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BOUND TO WIN

A TALE OF THE TURF.

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"COURTSHIP IN 1720, 1860;" ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CHAPTER I.

MID-WINTER SPECULATIONS.

THE racing season of 18— is a thing of the past, and around blazing fires turfites discuss the vexed question as to which was the best two-year of the bygone year. It is hard to deny the claims of The Felon to this distinction, and yet the followers of the green and silver braid vow that Ptolemy was only half trained when he won the Middle Park Plate, that he is a backward colt, and will be a very different horse when he is seen at Epsom

in May. The Blithedown stable, too, is somewhat of a conundrum to the public, and as to which is the veritable crack of that stable the learned in turf lore have much to say. Lacedemonian, although his owner was not there to see, and despite his exhibiting hocks of a very doubtful appearance, won the Criterion cleverly by a length, and there were not wanting those who held that he was the best of Darlington's string. Pooh-poohed, this idea, again by others, who bid you recollect the way Coriolanus was backed for his race, and declared that such running was far too bad to be true; that he never got off, and was, undoubtedly, the real Simon Pure of the stable. Amongst the initiated in turf mysteries, too, the singular story of Luxmoore's inheritance has oozed out, and that gives rise to still further debate on what will be the tactics of Blithedown in the coming campaign. In the opinion of the more astute of these gentlemen, Harold

Luxmoore will, probably, rely upon Lacedemonian for the Two Thousand Guineas, and keep Coriolanus for the Derby. The paramount interest he has in winning the latter race, would, they opine, be sufficient to induce him to risk the loss of the Two Thousand sooner than jeopardise his chance at Epsom. That the defeat of Coriolanus was looked upon as all a mistake was denoted by his status in the Derby betting, which at the commencement of the new year ruled as follows :—

5 to 1	against	The Felon
8 to 1	„	Ptolemy
10 to 1	„	Coriolanus
15 to 1	„	Lacedemonian.

For the Two Thousand, Ptolemy was first favourite, The Felon not being entered for that race; but the winner of the Criterion was also a good deal fancied, and but for his suspicious hocks would have been doubtless backed freely. Still, by that numerous class of small backers, who never go near

a race-course, and would be no whit enlightened by so doing, Lacedemonian was in good repute, and at the lists—they were in existence in the days of which I am writing—was nearly as good a favourite as the victor in the Middle Park Plate.

Meanwhile, Harold Luxmoore spends a good deal of his time at Laxton; he has had it fairly out with Mr. Layton, and acquainted him with the determination he has come to. Of course, the old gentleman can make no further objection after what he said at Liddington to receiving him as a son-in-law. The story of the misunderstanding between Gracie and Harold has been kept between the sisters and himself; they have agreed this is best, while it has also been decided to retain Luxmoore's resolve a profound secret. When Harold urged this, Mr. Layton at once assented, and even went so far as to propose that neither his son nor his wife should be made acquainted with it. The

old gentleman had heard a story or two about Berkley Holt of late that had rather opened his eyes to Berkley's true character, and, like a shrewd business man, he saw at a glance the enormous temptation to foul play that Harold's resolution offered to his cousin. Nine thousand a year and a flourishing stud of horses dangled before the eyes of a needy and unscrupulous racing-man, upon the proviso he prevents a certain stable from winning the next Derby, is rather too powerful a strain to subject a man of Holt's character to. The chance of many an Epsom candidate has been reduced to *nil* upon very much slighter provocation ; and so it came to pass that there was much less talk about the reconciliation of the lovers than would have been the case had the romantic story been generally known. In the county it had got abroad that the engagement between Mr. Luxmoore and Grace Layton was on again. It was rumoured that Mr.

Layton had withdrawn his prohibition upon the understanding that Harold was to abstain from betting henceforth, and, amid the young men of those parts, who knew what a daring bettor Luxmoore was, this resolution of his was hailed with much mirth and incredulity ; instances of the woeful shattering of such high resolve being manifold in turf history.

Considering what a gossip-loving world it is, and how prone we all are to discussion of the affairs of our neighbours, it will doubtless seem singular that Theodora Richeton should be still in ignorance of an event that so much concerned her as the coming together of Grace and Harold Luxmoore ; but an undoubted coldness had sprung up between her and the Layton family of late, and the widow, as it happened, had no other acquaintance in Bloomshire but Harold himself, and Luxmoore was peculiarly reticent about his re-engagement. Jim Laceby, was indeed, the only

one of his intimates in possession of the whole facts of the case, and the Honble. had counselled silence concerning it most strenuously for the present.

“We know, Harold, that there has been foul play about your correspondence,” said Jim, “though we don’t know who conspired against you, or with what object. I’d recommend a close mouth about it in future, at all events till after Epsom.”

The Honble. took Mr. Layton’s view of the case precisely, and with considerably stronger reason, insomuch as he was a more accurate judge of what Berkley Holt was capable in the way of turf intrigue; and could imagine his poisoning all Blithe-down—horses, trainer, and stable boys to boot, did he get fair opportunity of doing so without discovery—should he once become aware that Luxmoore intended to resign Liddington, if unsuccessful in the forthcoming Derby.

Then again, Berkley Holt, with that

devotion to his own interests, so eminently characteristic of that gentleman, had decided that Mrs. Richeton was not to be enlightened upon this point. Although affairs had prospered with him of late, Berkley was too prudent to deprive himself of such a golden spring as the fair widow's passion for Harold Luxmoore had placed at his disposal. "Always practicable to draw on that secret service fund," thinks Berkley, "in case of necessity, which is convenient. If I tell her how things stand, she will see at once it is so eminently to my interests that this marriage should take place, that it would be absurd to suppose I can be induced to take steps to prevent it. No, Mrs. Richeton must make her own discovery of the true state of affairs, and the longer she is in doing it, why—so much the better for Berkley."

Over the intelligence he has extracted from the fair Hemmings, Berkley has mused much. He can scarcely believe it

possible that a man can really contemplate such madness as the resignation of Liddington for any eyes, however bright.

By dint of flattery, bribes, and even still more by the acuteness he had shown in reading the ladies-maid's mind, he has completely re-established his ascendancy over that damsel. She has confided to him all she heard and witnessed, and returned to Laxton more devoted to him than ever, but placing a much humbler recompense upon her services; quite willing, indeed, to accept of Berkley's protection without preliminary of marriage at this present. Mr. Holt decides that it would be as well to keep even his devoted friend, Mr. Larcher, in ignorance of this change in his prospects for a little; not that it was possible to doubt the attorney's devoting himself enthusiastically to the cause when he but knew of so great an opportunity. It appealed to his greed of gold, and to his passion for obtaining it by fraudulent means.

There are plenty of men who will spend hours to trick their fellows out of a sum which could have been obtained in half the time by honest industry. Mr. Larcher was one of these. "I cannot do without him later on," muses Berkley, "but it is no use taking him into confidence before it is necessary. He's clever; so dev'lish clever, that he would go over to the other side if he thought he could make a better thing of it. I don't think that's possible; but, great heavens! what a miserable world it is, when one can't both win and lose with the same horse."

Messrs. Goodman and Osgrove are getting extremely anxious to know what is the programme to be pursued with regard to The Felon. It is subject of bitter lamentation to this pair of commonplace brigands that the horse is not entered for the Two Thousand; their petty-larceny minds about equal to contemplate the losing of the above stake and the winning

the Derby afterwards as an elaborate sort of thing in turf manœuvres ; sort of transparent pettifogging robbery that would occur to those who have got their livelihood by the running of nondescript horses on in-and-out principles for some years. Great frauds are always mapped out, at least, if not perpetrated, by master minds, and this axiom applies to the race-course equally with the Stock Exchange ; but, oh, ye children of the sward, what innocents ye are to your brethren of the City !

Still, fence it off as he may, pressure is being daily brought to bear upon Berkley by his confederates all through this dawning of the new year, to decide whether The Felon shall be a mere straw horse for Epsom—a horse that shall never attempt to win the Derby—Mr. Larcher, much of this way of thinking, that The Felon should be well beat at Epsom, and allowed to do his best at Doncaster. Only one thing determinate in this unrighteous confedera-

tion, that the horse, reported by his trainer to be doing extraordinary well, was to be run on "pecuniary principles," and no whit upon his merits, unless they happened to coincide with "pecuniary principles." Quite as much in favour of "pecuniary principles" is Berkley as any of his colleagues, but it is becoming more impressed day by day upon his mind, that his view of the case and his confederates' will be very different. If Sarah Hemmings's story is true, and he believes it is, there is nothing connected with the Derby can be of such consequence to him as that it should not be carried off by Blithedown. Quite prepared is Mr. Holt to resort to any means that may make Darlington's team innocuous at Epsom. He has money himself, he can draw a bit still on Mrs. Richeton, and he knows, again, Mr. Larcher will find more when the story is told to him, and yet he thinks no chance should be thrown away. It is well to have a good horse to run for

you, even when you suppose that you hold your opponent's bridle. How that was to be accomplished was as yet a thing Berkley had not much thought about. Difficult at present to discover which was most to be dreaded of his cousin's team ; difficult again to find an agent in the stable that could be relied on to administer the fatal blow, potion, or whatever it might be ; but Mr. Holt had no more misgivings about knowing which was the best of the Blithedown lot before the end of May, than he had that the crack would run in his interests instead of his master's. Berkley had successfully interfered before now with prominent fancies of the public's when he had the command of very much less money than he possessed at the present juncture. He held fast to the cynical aphorism of Sir Robert Walpole, and, though he expressed it differently, it came to virtually the same thing. When Berkley declared "every horse had its price," it was equiva-

lent to asserting that some one in charge of him had. Mr. Holt anticipated meeting with no more virtue in Blithedown than he held existed in any other establishment of the sort. He did not think that Mr. Darlington was to be bought, certainly, but considered him pretty well the only man connected with Blithedown that it would be imprudent to make overtures to.

Success in such roguery is wont to lower a man's standard of his fellows, and induce him to believe that humanity is for sale for the most part; just as successful turning of the king at *ecarté* might establish belief in the blindness and density of those with whom we associate. Hallucinations are apt to be rudely dispelled, but let them be dispelled ever so roughly, no votary ever clings so madly to his faith as the man who has once had recourse to malpractices, either on the green cloth or green sward.

On one point has Berkley Holt been specially assiduous during these winter

weeks, and that is, if possible, to get at the truth of the great *fiasco* of Coriolanus in the Middle Park Plate. To a nature such as Holt's, belief is difficult that a race has been lost by accident, not design. Midst all sorts of turf-goers does Berkley seek to discover whether Sam Burton was left behind by intention on that occasion, or otherwise. As may be supposed, he acquires quite as much unsubstantial testimony on the one side as the other. Plenty of people who never even saw that start were prepared to speak positively either one way or the other ; opinion, indeed, of such incompetent witnesses pretty evenly balanced, as in most cases where a favourite comes to infinite tribulation ; a close finish in the Derby, or any great race, invariably resulting in bitter criticism of the judge, and the unfortunate jockey whom it was given a head against. Public sympathy goes but rarely with the unsuccessful, but when the being vanquished

means the touching of the public's pockets, it would be folly to expect it.

Now, whatever deductions Berkley Holt might draw about the Middle Park Plate, Sam Burton's mishap upon that occasion had been, as far as he himself knew, a mere accident, and yet it was not so. Mr. Burton has the weakness of most heroes—wine and vanity. He could never resist a glass of champagne, nor belief in his own riding. He was no drunkard, and, when on duty, particularly careful in this respect; yet an invitation to crack a flask of Carte d'Or, his peculiar vanity, was a temptation he never had quite strength of mind to put behind him. On that eventful day at Newmarket, a book-maker, conversant with his weakness, had insisted on a bottle to Coriolanus's success just before the saddling-bell rung. The result was that Sam was jolly—by this I mean careless—at the start. He knew he was on a rattling good colt, and had the

best of the weights of everything deemed dangerous, bar Caraway. That he was five pound better than any jockey of the day was an established axiom with Sam Burton; he was consequently firmly impressed that he had at least half a stone in hand. Half a bottle of champagne, upon the top of the idea that one is immeasurably superior to everything else in the race, perhaps produces a little indifference about getting off; and that had been just Burton's case. He had been careless, and he had paid the penalty. Luxmoore, after his talk with Laceby, had fallen into the mistake of recurring to the Middle Park Plate *fiasco*, and administering sharp rebuke concerning it to his jockey. A mistake this, desperately common to humanity. Sam Burton had been prepared for severe reprimand in the first instance, but he had good right to hold that he had been arraigned and harangued, and that the thing was now past and done

with. That is the defect of Dante's hell; he believes ever in physical torment, as if eternal snow or eternal fire were to be compared to the torture of eternal nagging. You can flay a man alive but once, and sundown sees his spirit released; but you can flay him morally for years. Pooh! these old tormentors were mere neophytes in their science, and the Spanish Inquisition much behind the inquisitors of Belgravia. Harold Luxmoore, losing, had more than once recurred bitterly to Coriolanus's unfortunate performance, and at the end of the week Sam Burton felt by no means enthusiastic on the subject of his new master. Imprudent very was Burton, for he suffered two or three shrewd turf men to perceive this; and, more critical still for him, he allowed it to be transparent to Mr. Darlington, who, though of course absorbed in the question of whether his "Cardinal Yorks" could be possibly induced to blossom in April successfully, still seemed

to have eyes and ears ever open, and mouth ever closed, as was his custom on a race-course ; and yet that hardly describes Darlington, because he was by no means churlish of speech, conversing affably indeed on almost any subject, with a special leaning towards the growing of flowers, more particularly roses, and with some visible reluctance to talk more racing than the occasion absolutely required. Outcome of that unfortunate week at Newmarket, that Sam Burton felt no very great loyalty to his new master, and that Mr. Darlington felt a little distrustful of the jockey of the stable. Not a promising state of affairs this as a prelude to carrying off the Olympic crown.

By dint of much persevering study of men, and by the listening to many tales of verbosity and froth, Berkley Holt has come to some understanding of this case ; not quiet sure yet that Burton did not deliberately lose the Middle Park Plate

for reasons tangible and golden ; yet drawing, from all he can make out, that Sam Burton is, at all events, a man it is possible to make a bid for. Very determined, indeed, to make that bid is Berkley; but though he knows many of the jockeys, it so happens he is unacquainted with Sam Burton. Still, he thinks there is not much difficulty about that. "Bah! it is but taking a room, and living at the John o' Groat for a month or so, and the thing is done. Certain to come across him there, and the offer of a cigar, or for the matter of that, a remark, constitutes an acquaintanceship in an hotel of that sort."

Berkley Holt, steadily haunting the John o' Groat, is not long before he scrapes acquaintance with Sam Burton. Keen and shrewd, Berkley is not long before he discovers his new acquaintance's weak points, and is for ever insisting upon their trying new brands of champagne. Not so

discreet as his kind generally, Sam babbles a little over his wine cup, and Holt, whose capabilities in that way resemble Mynheer von Dunck's, chuckles much over the revelations that are made to him. Still, Berkley is much too judicious ever to allude to such communications afterwards—a reticence that leaves Sam sometimes with an uneasy feeling that he had said more than he ought to have done, alternating with the belief that he had either not done so, or had not been understood. One thing, however, thoroughly clear to him is, that he is engaged to dine with Berkley Holt at the John o' Groat on the Friday before the Two Thousand.

CHAPTER II.

CHALLIS'S.

ON the left-hand side of Rupert Street stands a tavern, of late years expanded into an hotel, that is a house of mark of its kind. London hotels have their specialities. Crowned heads go to Meurice's, and did to the Clarendon while the Clarendon was. Young men of means, entering on life, gravitate to Long's, and, till the desecration of carpets was committed in its coffee-room, were much given to Limmer's. Americans throng to the Langham; wealth betakes itself to the Grosvenor and Alexandra; but Newmarket goes to Challis's. A few

years back, and Challis's was the John o' Groat, more familiarly known to its *habitues* as "Gregory's," but it changed hands, and blossomed into an hotel; the coffee-room expanded, and the smoking-room grew; still, its *clientelle* remained the same, and the leading horsemen of the turf are as faithful to Challis's, when in town, as their predecessors were to Gregory's. A house, too, this with a considerable country connection, filling up for the cattle week pretty nearly as much as for the Derby, and at that time Challis's really does not know exactly where to stow its customers. The snug little coffee-room is literally full to overflowing, and well ventilated as the cosy smoking-room is, yet the cigars are all too much for ventilators to cope with, and the flow of tongues is shrouded in a haze of smoke; but when Challis's is not labouring under such pressure, when "John" has not to undertake the superintendence of half a

score dinners at a time, and the smokers gather in moderation, one may do infinitely worse than dine at Challis's.

The ascetics of the saddle, from time immemorial, have been addicted to feasting when an interim in their labours permitted. Frank Buckle—is it not recorded in turf history—always sat down to a roast goose on the Saturday of the Houghton Meeting, and I should imagine many of those whose sigh is, “Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,” must make amends for their enforced abstinence when the “hay and corn” gathering is once got fairly done with, and they are assured that no clerk of the scales shall trouble them for the next three or four months. At all events that was Mr. Burton's conception of getting through the off season. He liked theatres, good living, Carte d'Or, and the pleasant round of London dissipation generally; the Cambridgeshire week once over, and Challis's saw a good deal of Sam Burton.

Hence, as may be easily conceived, a thorough London man, like Berkley Holt, when he once took to frequenting the John o' Groat, easily made acquaintance with the jockey. Berkley had plenty of talk of all kinds ; he knew what was going on at the theatres, and was conversant with the gossip of the *coulisses*, and, like many others in very superior position to himself, this was an attractive subject always to Sam Burton. In short, by the time the racing season commenced again, Berkley and his cousin's jockey were fast friends.

All through the winter the betting on the Two Thousand had varied little ; Ptolemy was first favourite, and Lacedemonian second ; while both Hypocrite and Coriolanus were occasionally backed, the former at twelve and the latter at twenty to one, but when the spring got more advanced, it was noticeable that every now and then there was an outburst of hostility

to Lacedemonian. There was no disguise about the cause of these demonstrations ; it was known that the horse was infirm, and there were not wanting those who vowed he would never stand a preparation for such a race as the Guineas. Coriolanus would have been strongly supported but for the prevalent idea that he would be reserved for the Derby ; the public having quite settled in its own mind that Blithedown would fall back upon Hypocrite as their champion, should the Criterion winner fail them. But the week before the First Spring Meeting at Newmarket arrives, and still the horse-watchers report Lacedemonian to be galloping strong and well. Those who had opened fire so often, and laid heavily against the colt, begin to get frightened, and take their money back again. The result is that Lacedemonian becomes a better favourite than ever, finally passing Ptolemy in the quotations. Such is the state of affairs upon the Friday

before the big race, on the evening of which day, it may be remembered, that Sam Burton was engaged to dine with Berkley Holt at Challis's.

Berkley has secured one of the tables next the fireplace, and given very precise and somewhat voluminous orders concerning this repast. Especially has he commanded that the Perrier and Jouett should be well iced and bountifully handed round, for Berkley has made up his mind that Sam Burton must be turned inside out this evening, if possible. He knows that the Blithedown horses have been tried this week, and he is pretty sure that Burton rode in the trial. If, as is probable, all the three-year-olds were engaged, there is, of course, no question now as to which is the best of them with the stable; and this, remember, is a point of vital importance for Berkley to discover. Upon inquiry at the bar, he learns that Mr. Burton arrived from Newmarket about

half an hour ago, and, while discussing a glass of sherry thereat, he is joined by that worthy.

“Dinner ’ll be ready in a few minutes,” said Berkley, as he greeted the jockey; “come into the coffee-room and sit down. I’ve got a corner table, and all the luxuries of the season. Oysters for the last time this season to begin with. We’ll say good-bye to them with a tear, eh, my epicurean prince of the pigskin?”

As he spoke he led the way into the quaint little coffee-room, and passed up to a table upon which the delicacies in question, with their concomitants of brown bread and butter and lemon, were duly displayed. A quietly dressed man, with a rather sporting cut about his light-coloured scarf, seated at a table next the door, raised his eyes as the pair passed him, gazed somewhat curiously at them for a second, and then became once more absorbed in his newspaper. His back

being towards the door, Holt does not catch sight of this individual's face, nor, indeed, engaged as he is talking to the jockey, does he notice him, and, from his being seated in the recess on the left of the entrance to the coffee-room, he is not very plainly visible when Berkley and his guest have taken their places.

"Well, Sam," said Holt, as he tossed off his glass of Chablis, "I suppose you've about settled the Two Thousand by this at Blithedown?"

"Yes," replied the jockey, "we shall be handy, I dare say."

"Put them together, I suppose; and which am I to stand?"

"You must wait, Mr. Holt. I can't tell you anything as yet. Of course we've had a trial, you know that as well as I do, but I ain't at liberty to say what come of it."

"Never mind that. You'll win next Tuesday on one of them, no doubt. I shall know which to back when I see

which you ride ; that will be time enough for me," and with this Berkley dropped the subject for the present, and rattled on about other topics, still keeping a vigilant eye upon the condition of his companion's glass, which he took good care should be always promptly replenished. By the time dinner is over, Sam Burton is talking somewhat vain-gloriously of his feats in the saddle, and relating more than one anecdote of his professional triumphs over his brethren, no one of whom he honestly believes can ride upon even terms with himself.

"Yes," rejoined Berkley ; "you are quite right, you're about three pound better than any of them, certainly—five when you're once off."

"Once off!" retorted Burton, indignantly. "You think I'm not as quick at starting as anybody? Nonsense! nobody ever gets half a length the best of me when the flag falls."

"Hum! I don't know, Sam. How about the Middle Park Plate?"

"Well, I suppose we must all have an accident sometimes. That Coriolanus, too, you see's a little awkward."

"Awkward, pooh! no horse is awkward in the hands of a first-class horseman. He didn't run awkward when you were once away with him; but that's what I say is your weak point—getting away."

"Well, you see if I don't get away next Tuesday with him, and make a pretty mess of the rest of 'em!"

"Don't talk bosh, Sam; of course, you'll ride Lacedemonian. I've got a monkey on him, and mean to see it out;" and, as Berkley spoke, he threw himself back in his chair, with the air of a man who had no more to say.

Sam Burton looked cautiously round the coffee-room for a moment—it was empty—the gentleman next the door had taken his departure. "Look here," he said at

length, "I don't want you to be let in—hedge. It'll be all over town in another four-and-twenty hours. Lacedemonian's hock went in the trial."

"And they're going to win with Coriolanus?" inquired Berkley, eagerly.

"I don't know," replied Sam. "No one ever does know what Darlington means exactly; but if they don't win with Coriolanus, the Two Thousand won't go to Blithedown."

"What about Hypocrite?"

"He's a bigger coward than ever, and curled up yesterday evening as badly as he did at Doncaster."

"Tell me what the trial was exactly, Sam."

"Well, I have pretty well."

"Were they all in it?"

"Yes; mind, this is strictly confidential, Mr. Holt," said Burton, with just a little ripple in his speech. "I rode Shooting Star, and Coriolanus won quite cleverly."

Beggarman finished within half a length of me, while Hypocrite and Lady Disdain were beaten off."

"And Lacedemonian?"

"Was well with us till the last two hundred yards, when the hock went. He could hardly put his foot to the ground going home."

"Beggarman's being so handy doesn't seem to make it a great trial," rejoined Holt, meditatively. "I didn't think much of him when he ran for the Champagne last year."

"He's improved a good bit, though he's a queer-looking one still; but Coriolanus is far away the best of the bundle."

"Know anything about the weights?" asked Berkley.

"Not for certain. Darlington is not communicative; but I suppose I was giving the young ones a stone all round, perhaps a little more to the filly, but while Coriolanus keeps well, you needn't trouble

about which is the best of the Blithedown lot."

"And you think they'll run him for the Guineas?"

"He's quite sound, and wonderfully well. They will win no Two Thousand if they don't; they've nothing else in with a chance. Let's go and have a cigar."

Sam Burton had not the slightest intention of divulging the history of the Blithedown trial when he sat down to dinner; but he'd been living a good deal lately with a man who had studied him attentively, and made it his business to know the weak points in his character. That he was a little apt to be talkative when the champagne got into his head, Berkley was quite as well aware as he was that any reflections on his horsemanship invariably threw Sam quite off his balance. When his host jeered him about not "getting off" in the Middle Park Plate, he was galled, as Holt intended he should

be. Stung by this reflection on his skill, he suffered his tongue to run riot, and in blustering about what he would do in the future, allowed so much of the truth to escape him that he thought he might as well tell the whole story. Then, again, he had felt honestly anxious that Holt should save his five hundred, if possible, and it was quite on the cards to lay the odds to that amount against Lacedemonian before the collapse of that colt became generally known. Still, the jockey, despite the champagne, had qualms anent his incautious revelations, and when they were quietly settled down to their coffee and cigars, vowed his host to secrecy.

“You won’t say nothing about what I’ve been telling you, of course. You just hedge your monkey as soon as you can to-morrow, and then, Mr. Holt, when you see me on Coriolanus for the Guineas—well, just you have a good bet on it. You mustn’t touch it before, mind.”

"Certainly not," replied Berkley, with some effusion. "Very much obliged for your hint, Sam, and shall act upon it as soon as may be. Just touch the bell: I'm all for a little seltzer and brandy."

"Right you are!" responded Sam Burton, and the pair were speedily supplied with brimming beakers of the desired potation.

Holt continued to ply his guest with drink and tobacco, till at length the jockey, unmistakably the worse for his consumption of these two articles, arrived at the conclusion that it was time for him to go to bed. Berkley having wished him good-night, and seen him ascend the stairs with somewhat faltering step, threw himself into a hansom, and with a brief command to drive to "the Oxford," departed.

There was a good deal of business transacted after midnight at "the musical Tattersall's," as it was the fashion to call it in those times, on the eve of a big race, and

Holt found several of the bookmaking fraternity lounging about the body of the music-hall, ready to bet upon the Two Thousand. Before the establishment closed, the betting on the Guineas had undergone an utter revolution. Coriolanus from an outside price, had been brought to seven to one; while Lacedemonian, retiring from three to one, was now scarcely a better favourite than his stable companion. These changes were, of course, due to the operations of Berkley Holt, who viewed promises much in the light that Fielding tells us they were regarded by the great Mr. Wild, as probably affording some comfort to the person to whom they were pledged, and as imposing no restriction whatever upon one's self.

While Holt was devoting his attention, in the smoking-room at Challis's, to the further extinction of Sam Burton's intellects, Dr. Slocombe, in the night train, on his way home to Liddington, was

marvelling much upon that strange discovery he had chanced upon. "What could be the meaning," he asked himself again and again, "of Berkley Holt and Harold Luxmoore's jockey dining together in this familiar fashion?" It was but seldom that the doctor came to town, probably not more than twice or thrice a year, and then his visits were of the briefest; but, when he did, he invariably put up at Challis's. Business had called him up for a couple of days, and he had just concluded an early dinner, previous to catching the mail train into Bloomshire, when Holt and Sam Burton had entered the coffee-room. Though it was some years since he had set eyes on the former, he recognized him instantly, and it was quite likely that, had he attracted Berkley's attention, the recognition would have been mutual, for, in his early days, when he had been so much at Liddington, Holt had, of course, known the doctor tolerably well.

To a man who never missed a day's racing when he could compass it, the face of so leading a jockey as Sam Burton was, of course, familiar ; moreover, he had taken much notice of him only a few months back, upon the occasion of the race for the Middle Park Plate. Dr. Slocombe, it must be borne in mind, had the worst possible opinion of Berkley. He knew all the particulars of poor Lizzie Dixon's ruin. He was acquainted with more than one story of Mr. Holt's turf practices, and he argued that his intimacy with the jockey of the Blithedown stable augured no good to the black and crimson hoops. He kept turning the thing over in his own mind all the way home. What did it behove him to do under these circumstances ? He decided to have a talk over the matter with Calvert next day, and yet he could not see much could come of that. He knew, as did the stud-groom, that Holt had an interest in his cousin's not being

successful at Epsom, and the doctor further believed Berkley quite capable of interfering with any race-horse's chance, should the horse in question winning be inimical to his interests. Had Luxmoore been at the Grange, the doctor thought it would have been easy to have just called in and told the story of what he had seen, without comment of any sort, or without any particular stress on the thing, and it would have been for Harold then to have taken such steps as he deemed expedient. Whatever the squire might think in his own mind concerning his cousin, it was quite possible he would dislike to have him accused of being capable of tampering with his horses or servants in any way. In short, the doctor, with a firm conviction that all was wrong, could see no possible way of imparting his suspicions to him whom such information chiefly concerned.

When he talked it over the next day with Calvert, the stud-groom shook his

head gloomily, and said, "There 'll be no bells rung for the Two Thousand at Liddington if that scoundrel, Berkley Holt, has got his finger in the pie." But when, on the Sunday morning, the twain perused their *Bell's Life*, they were dumbfounded by the revolution in the betting.

Now Liddington had thought, as the public in general had thought, that Lacedemonian would represent Blithedown in the Two Thousand, while Coriolanus would do battle for the black and crimson hoops at Epsom; but here were the two horses within a point of the same price for the Guineas. The doings at the Oxford on Friday night were, of course, in most of the papers on Saturday morning.

But if the doctor and Calvert were astonished, there were divers other people considerably more astonished than they. Mr. Burton, quenching a parched throat with a morning draught of some description, and glancing his eye over the paper

in the coffee-room at Challis's, becomes conscious that he must have let the cat out of the bag, and has altogether made a considerable mess of things generally. He anathematizes his host of the preceding evening with considerable unction, and wonders whether it will occur to Darlington to suspect him, or whether, spite of all the care with which the trial was conducted, it will be put down to the door of some cunning horse-watcher.

Mr. Plyant coming down to breakfast in his comfortable house in Bedford Place, clean-shaved, smiling, and confident, and bearing in his hand a letter from Harold Luxmoore containing instructions to back Coriolanus for a couple of thousand, is perfectly thunderstruck upon opening his paper. Mr. Plyant does not often condescend to frequent the Oxford, and had been comfortably in bed when those midnight transactions of the previous evening had been accomplished. Mr. Plyant bustles

down to the Victoria Club as soon as he deems he shall find its members assembled, and, in answer to a demand about Lacedemonian, is accommodated with six fifties immediately ; but when he smilingly observes he's a "com." to back Coriolanus for a monkey, there's an ominous silence for some minutes. At last Redcar observes quietly, " You can have five to one, if you like, to that figure ;" and after some little sparring, Mr. Plyant is fain to accept those terms, but an attempt to book four to one to a like sum proves bootless, while ten to one against Lacedemonian is freely offered almost immediately afterwards. Mr. Plyant, finding further negotiation about Coriolanus, except at a very short price indeed, hopeless, determines to go off to the Reunion and see Harold Luxmoore, and take further instructions about his commission.

" It's a rum un, this," remarked Mr. Plyant, meditatively, as he stepped into a cab, and if Mr. Luxmoore tells me what's

up, I shall perhaps make it out. At present it seems to me there's somebody else knows quite as much as Darlington, and was just a little quicker in turning his knowledge to account. They've got all the Coriolanus money pretty well; and if that horse was mine, he'd be in his box at Blithedown when the Two Thousand was run. If they could only win now with Lacedemonian, what a turning of the tables it would be, and what an afternoon I'd have at Tattersall's on Monday;" and Mr. Plyant chuckled at the bare idea.

CHAPTER III.

WAITING FOR THE VERDICT.

HAROLD LUXMOORE and the Honble. Jim are breakfasting together [at the Reunion somewhere about noon, and leisurely skimming the morning papers as they dawdle over their meal.

“Plyant seems to have been pretty prompt about getting to work,” remarked Jim Laceby. “I see Coriolanus very near passed the Spartan child in the quotations last night.”

“Well, of course, the backing him in earnest would send Lacedemonian back,” replied Harold, “and I take it, ere the day’s out, intelligence of his mishap will be bruited abroad freely.”

"Hang it, Harold, with all *your* stake on it, I can't fancy how you were ever induced to risk running Coriolanus for the Guineas, whatever grief the Spartan had come to."

"Jim," replied the other, "I'm so much wound up about this Derby—the tension is so great—that I'm almost afraid to think for myself. I was of your way of thinking; but Darlington talked me over. He argued that the colt was fit, well, and above all things—sound. He said that it would be good for the horse to see a crowd, and take part in a big race. According to his trial, Darlington considers he should about win; he urges it is a big stake to pass over, and that the postponing the knowledge of what he can or cannot do, makes his Derby chance neither better nor worse."

"And he thinks, of course, the Newmarket race will not invalidate his Epsom chance?"

“Certainly not; he lays much weight upon the fact that he is thoroughly sound, and declares he had better gallop on the Rowley Mile than at Blithedown.”

“Won his trial clever, didn’t he?”

“Yes; and Darlington assured me that there was no half asking of the question: he beat Shooting Star a length cleverly at 12lb.”

“Well, that should be good enough, more especially as The Felon’s not in it; but I’ll own, Harold, that now you and Grace Layton have come together again, I am as excited about this Derby as yourself. I want to see you free from that onerous condition old Oliver has laid upon you; free to race or leave it alone, as best pleaseth you. I don’t want to be indiscreet; but, I presume, the old gentleman has come to some reasonable understanding with you.”

“Gracie and I have, which is better. You hold your tongue, please, about this,

Jim ; but if it don't come off this time, I'm going to give up Liddington, and let Berkley try his luck."

"Good God ! Harold, you must be mad !" rejoined the Honble., surveying his friend through his eye-glass with unmitigated astonishment.

"Very far from it," replied Luxmoore, laughing. "I should go through as much of Liddington as is possible in three years at the outside, most likely in less, and be a good deal bored to boot. No ; I've chosen for the best, believe me."

"What ! staking your whole inheritance on the result of one Derby ?"

"That is my uncle's doing ; but I'll not stake an honest girl's love, my stake, mind you, year after year, till her life and mine are wasted, to win fifty Liddingtons in the end. No, Jim, I'm no fool in this matter."

The Honble. said nothing for a few seconds, then, rising, he gripped Harold's hand hard, as he murmured somewhat

huskily, — “ No, old fellow ; you’re a man ! ”

These worldly-cynical men have a heart under all that upper crust, if you can only get at it ; not so difficult that either, as one might suppose.

“ By the way,” said Laceby, after a little pause, “ did you ever succeed in making out how your correspondence had been tampered with ? ”

“ Not altogether, but pretty nearly. There can be no doubt that it was done at the Laxby end of the post. To begin with, some of my letters were written from here when I ran up for a few days, and thrown into the club letter-box with my own hand, so that my valet had very partial control of my share of the correspondence. Secondly, Gracie recollects perfectly that the Ascot note I never received she gave to her maid to post, and in talking it over we have come to the conclusion that it was possible for her, and

no one else, to have interfered with it. The Ascot note is strong suspicion, and indeed the whole thing is no more, though neither Gracie, Annie, nor myself have any moral doubt. Another test: supposing that maid of theirs, Sarah Hemmings, is the culprit, she knows that Gracie and I have come together again; she knows that we must have discovered our letters have been tampered with; the natural result on her part would be fear of further malpractices in that line. Don't you think so?"

"Quite probable," replied the Honble., as he leant lazily back against the mantel-piece.

"Good. I wrote Gracie a letter the other day, and gave it my valet to post; she got that all right. Now, of course, he doesn't know of our reconciliation."

The Honble. surveyed the speaker for a moment or two with languid curiosity, and then murmured, "Don't he? my dear

Harold, of course he does, and everything else about you ; d—d fellows always do. He's probably away in the City this moment, getting a little on Coriolanus. No ; I fancy you're right, and that the young woman is the offender ; but never suppose your valet don't know. It's very good of him to pretend ignorance. But the question is, if Sarah Hemmings—isn't that her name?—took those letters, why did she take them ? She didn't take them without a motive, and that could only have been because she either wished, or was paid, to oblige some one else. What are they going to do with her ? No row, I suppose ? ”

“ Oh dear no ; she was sent away last month. Simply, her services were no longer required.”

“ Yes ; quite the best thing to do. She affected injured innocence, naturally, and swore she duly posted that Ascot note ? ”

“ Just so. Made rather a scene ; called

Heaven to witness to the truth of her asseverations, and all the rest of it."

"Exactly. It wasn't likely she would confess, even had they been able to accuse her of making away with that letter, which, I suppose, they did not?"

"No; Gracie, in her wrath, was rather for doing so, but Annie and myself persuaded her to do no more than ask the simple question; but the girls agree that her exaggerated protestations that she did not do so, left little doubt of her guilt."

"Yes; that class always commit themselves in such manner. They don't understand the virtue of a quiet, steadfast denial."

"Gentleman to see you, sir," said a waiter, as he presented a card to Luxmoore.

"Ha! Show him into the waiting-room. Plyant, by Jove, Jim! Come, and let's hear what he's done."

"All right! responded the Honble., and

the two strolled through the hall to a little waiting-room on its right, set apart for the reception of those who might come to see the members on business. There they found Mr. Plyant, and that the genial commissioner was ill at ease was at once apparent to both his patrons.

"Good morning, sir; morning, Mr. Laceby," said Mr. Plyant, rising as they entered. "I have called in for a little business talk before going down to Tattersall's."

"Why; what is it?" inquired Luxmoore.

"It's about this commission, sir, to back Coriolanus."

"Well, judging by the papers this morning, I should think it's about half done," said Laceby.

"That's where it is, Mr. Laceby, it's not half, but a good three-quarters done; but it's not of my doing. I can't make it out, nor who pulled the strings. It was all done

at the Oxford last night, and I only got Mr. Luxmoore's letter this morning."

"Then you mean to say," said Harold, "that somebody else has been backing Coriolanus."

"Precisely so. Somebody had similar instructions a good twelve hours before I got mine, and he's made the most of 'em. I got £2500 to £500 with a good deal of difficulty when I got down to the Victoria Club this morning, about twelve, and only got that by putting fifty on Lacedemonian to begin with."

"How the devil could the trial have leaked out?" exclaimed Harold.

"Nobody present but you and Darlington, I suppose?" observed Laceby.

"Not a soul that I know of, and it is not easy for a horse-watcher to lie hidden on such utterly open downs as those."

"Well; some one's got the office," returned Mr. Plyant, doggedly. "I understand doing a 'com.' as well as any man,

but there's no doing a commission when somebody else is a-doing it in front of you."

"Quite right, Plyant," observed Laceby. "when the market's forestalled there's not much to be done."

"I should like to put these beggars in the hole, upon my life I should," returned the bookmaker earnestly. "Couldn't you go for Lacedemonian, after all, sir? From the way he won the Criterion he ought to be about good enough, if he's wintered well."

"I meant winning with him, if I could, Plyant," rejoined Harold; "but his hock gave way in the trial."

The commissioner indulged in a low whistle. "That's the game, is it?" he cried at last. "Mr. Luxmoore, if I were you I'd strike Coriolanus out. I shall not get above three to one about him this afternoon, and not even that to the extent of your commission."

"No ; he must run now, Plyant ; but, under the circumstances, you need not put more than another five hundred on for me at present."

"Very good, sir. I shan't get at it most likely till after the race is over, but I shall find out then who does get the money if Coriolanus wins, depend upon it. And, as far as that helps to clear up matters, rely upon me, Mr. Luxmoore ; but you may put it down as a fact, sir, that there's somebody knows more about Blithedown just now than they have any business to. Good day, gentlemen."

"I don't like this, Jim," said Harold, moodily, as Mr. Plyant took his departure. "Do you think he's right ?"

"Yes," replied the Honble., "I do ; and, by G—d, we shall have to work out the problem before Epsom, or else Coriolanus will never win. I wonder what Darlington will say to it all when he hears of it ?"

Harold laughed. "I can't say, Jim, but

I'll lay odds he don't say much, and that the little he does will be highly ambiguous. Darlington, when a knotty point comes before him, is a perfect Sphinx."

The Laytons arrived in Grosvenor Gardens about the middle of April, and we may be sure Harold Luxmoore cannot be accused of shunning the house this season. Scarce a day passes without his putting in an appearance, and the old gentleman is so impressed with his son-in-law's (that is to be) chivalry, that he hardly knows how to make enough of him. There can be no doubt about the sincerity of a man's love, who has determined to sacrifice nine thousand a year sooner than not wed the girl of his choice; and, like his daughters and all connected with and conversant of the romantic story, Mr. Layton is getting wild with excitement about the approaching Derby.

It is the Sunday night before the Newmarket First Spring Meeting, and Harold,

who has dined in Grosvenor Gardens, is sitting over the fire, gossiping with the sisters in a low tone.

“And next Tuesday, Harold, the horse which carries all Liddington on his back is to make his first genuine essay in public. We shall not sleep a wink from this until we get your telegram, mind.”

“Yes; you’ll not forget that, Harold, please,” interposed Gracie. “I am terribly anxious for your sake. I tremble to think what price it is I’m like to cost you. Are you sure——?”

“Yes; hold your tongue, you little rebel! Don’t you know that is an interdicted subject, and not to be spoken about. I’m content to take you, and you’re content to take me, on a limited income, and Annie says she can live upon chops, hot and hot, so we shall see her at times, no doubt.”

“You are sanguine of success this week, are you not? Although it is but the prelude, the *lever du rideau* before the

drama, I own I shall auger ill if you prove unfortunate," said Miss Layton.

"Certainly ; if I'm beaten at Newmarket, I can hardly expect to win at Epsom ; but don't be apprehensive about the overture. I shall win on Tuesday ; whether they let me win Liddington, in May, I can't say."

"Harold, what can you mean ?" exclaimed Grace.

"Simply this, that unfortunately the turf, like other pursuits, is tainted with an element of scoundrelism ; some of these people have, I am afraid, got a confederate established in my service, and, consequently, I am more or less at their mercy."

"Discharge him at once," cried Annie, promptly.

"You see, unfortunately, I haven't even the slightest suspicion who he is. You may know there's a traitor in the camp, but know no more."

"True ; there was Hemmings to wit," remarked Gracie with a smile.

"But why should they not exercise evil influences on the gallant Coriolanus this week?" inquired Annie.

"Because they have apparently backed him, and so wish him to win. What it may suit them to do at Epsom it is hopeless to conjecture, but unless between this and then I discover who of the Blithedown establishment it is that they have corrupted, I may have the best horse, but have no manner of chance of winning the Derby."

"Infamous!" said Miss Layton.

"How wicked, how downright wicked!" cried Gracie, vehemently. "But you will find out, will you not?"

"I hope so, I think so," replied Luxmoore; "and now I must say good-bye. I promised to look in for Jim Laceby at the Reunion, just to hear the latest news about Tuesday's race, and we have to make an early start to-morrow morning."

"Good-bye. I wish you luck, you know; but luck or no luck, you're my very own

Harold, remember," said Gracie softly, as her lover embraced her.

"Adieu, Harold," replied Miss Layton. "Come back to us victorious if you can; but at all events you'll come back. Mean-time, don't forget two young women, quivering with curiosity, are waiting for the verdict in Grosvenor Gardens. So, as Mr. Laceby tersely expresses it, 'wire.'"

"I'll remember," said Harold, laughing; "and you shall have 'a wire' as soon after the race as may be."

* * * * *

A keen nor'-easter sweeps through the streets and squares of London this April day, and more than one of the West End sybarites shudders as he hurries to his club, and thanks his stars that he has postponed his racing campaign till the summer solstice. He meditates upon how far great coats and throat-wraps would avail against the bitter blast that he knows full well now

sweeps across Newmarket Heath, and, upon the whole, comes to the conclusion that it is perhaps as well to await the report of the racing tissue about the upshot of the Two Thousand, as to practically see what fight his fancy makes for the pony which has been entrusted to it. But, nevertheless, there is a visible simmer of excitement at the clubs about the first great three-year-old race of the season; and that curious but indescribable throng that invariably pervades the vicinity of the offices of the sporting journals, is unmistakably upon the boil. Mr. Layton, on his way to the City, finds himself studying the "Betting at Midnight," instead of the City Article, as it behoves a *douce* business man to do; fain to confess to himself, Mr. Layton, that the business he has most to heart this day will be transacted on Newmarket Heath about 3 p.m. Mr. Layton, steadily perusing his paper, and taking advantage of Breakspear's

vaticinations, comes to the conclusion that Coriolanus will win, if Ptolemy, Caraway, or divers unnamed outsiders do not interfere—a little vagueness characterizing Breakspear, as was the custom generally with the Oracles of Delphi. It were well prophets had always exercised like discretion. Mr. Layton further gathers that Coriolanus has superseded Ptolemy in the quotations, and is now first favourite for the Two Thousand. Mr. Layton has a vision dancing in front of his letters, ledgers, or whatever they may be, all that forenoon, of a species of kaleidoscope, in which black and crimson invariably comes to the top, midst a fierce shriek of “Coriolanus wins!” Mr. Layton rarely commits the indiscretion of luncheon, but upon this particular day he vanishes from his office for more than an hour, and might, sad to say, have been seen hovering about the window of a sporting journal in the Strand, from which he retired at length, solaced

with the intelligence that six to four was taken freely about the son of Veturia.

And were there not beating hearts and anxious thoughts in Grosvenor Gardens, do you imagine? Annie Layton has caught that interest which was inevitable to any one nearly connected with so exciting a drama as that which was now being played; and what could the heroine feel, but terrible anxiety as to how her knight's colours bore themselves in the fray? Acquit the girl of any mercenary motive, and still it was impossible to overlook the sacrifice her lover was about to make for her sake. She gloried, like a true woman, that it should be so, but equally did she trust that such sacrifice should never be exacted; and by what Coriolanus might do to-day was to be gauged his capability of defending the Liddington estates for their present possessor.

"It's simply terrible, Annie," exclaimed Gracie Layton at last. "I never pictured

it before, but fancy going through this every year, as would have been the case had not Harold made up his mind to have done with it. Do you think he will mind very, very much, giving up his big house, and becoming a poor man ? ”

“ No, I do not think so ; remember, he is no rich man at Liddington, clogged with these conditions, and, liberal as one can see papa means to be, there will be no very great loss of income to him ; and I think, Gracie, my dear, you represent the difference, and a good deal more to him. He will regret giving up the old house ; but I honestly think he will never regret being out of the racing. Mr. Laceby told me, last time he was here, that if Harold didn't win the Derby in the next two years at the outside, he never would.”

“ Why so ? ” asked Gracie.

“ Just what I inquired, and this is what he said :—‘ Harold is so reckless in his betting, that nothing but great luck can

keep him out of difficulties ; difficulties with a gentleman are apt to result in his having no further control over his horses, and shameful smearing of his escutcheon ; he had better die, or levant, than that, but they don't."

" Oh, yes ; and Harold told me himself that day at Laxton, you arch plotter, that he had no heart in the thing ; that it bored him unless he gambled fearfully."

" Exactly, and that must be fatal ; but it's past three, we may begin to expect the telegram now. Surely that's a knock."

A sharp rat-tat was speedily followed by the opening of the street door, and the two girls anxiously awaited the appearance of the yellow-tinted envelope ; but there was either unaccountable delay on the part of the servants, or else the knock had not heralded the arrival of the telegram. A somewhat heavy footfall is heard upon the stairs, the handle of the door turns, and Mr. Layton appeared upon the threshold,

struggling hard to maintain an austere demeanour.

"It's only papa!" exclaimed Gracie, in tones of unmistakable disappointment, as she turned her face once more to the fire.

"Yes, papa, but with good news for us. He has heard all about it, I can see," cried Annie. "You never could succeed in looking very grave, papa, and at present you are failing lamentably to keep your countenance."

"I found a boy with this note at the door," returned Mr. Layton, dissolving into an unmistakably broad grin, "and it really looks to me as if Grace was receiving what's termed 'racing tissue.'"

"Give it me, papa," cried the girl, as she caught it from his hand. "I can see it's good news!" and she tore open the yellow envelope, "*viva* Annie!"

"From Harold Luxmoore, Newmarket, to Miss Grace Layton, Grosvenor Gardens. Coriolanus in a canter. Won by two lengths was the verdict."

CHAPTER IV.

THEODORA'S GOOD-BYE.

IF Mrs. Richeton had been kept in ignorance of the reconciliation between Harold and Grace Layton, while the lovers still sojourned in Bloomshire, it was by no means surprising. She knew nobody in that county except the Laytons, and how her intimacy with them had waned we have already seen ; moreover, she thought that Berkley Holt would be quite certain to give her the earliest intelligence of any such healing of the difference between them ; but Berkley had good reason for withholding his information on this point, and was scarcely likely to let the widow know the truth till she had pretty well

discovered it for herself. The Laytons once in town, and Holt knew that Theodora Richeton must speedily discover the real state of the case. Before Grosvenor Gardens had been tenanted a week, Theodora had twice encountered the sisters riding with Harold in the Row ; a few days more, and she had no difficulty in ascertaining that "Luxmoore's engagement with that Layton girl was on again." Dear old Lady Suntowers, indeed, had a great deal to say concerning it. "The most audacious conception ever heard off, my dear," quoth that veteran scandal-monger. "Took to her bed and the spitting of red ink and water. 'Going into a decline,' quoth the doctor. More chalk to her cheeks, and more stains of red ink on her lace pocket-handkerchief. She had studied the Traviata pretty closely, that girl. At last she gives out, as her days are numbered, she should like to bid this faithless lover of hers good-bye. Opposition of the

father ; grand simulation of coughing-fit by the heroine—father hustled out of the room. More chalk ; and handkerchief literally died in red ink this time. Poor old Mr. Layton recalled, and warned that he must be careful, as the slightest opposition may kill his daughter ; that he has already occasioned the bursting of a small blood-vessel. Naturally, the old imbecile melts,” concluded Lady Suntowers. “ The other imbecile is sent for. Tableaux—pale young woman in bed, and blubbing boobly by the side of it—farewell most touching ; agonised father, ‘ Take her—race, cockfight, prizefight—what you will, only save her ! ’ *She took him—in*, some people say, and has been pretty well ever since.”

Dear old Lady Suntowers had a pretty knack of dressing up a story, bless her palsied old head !

Theodora Richeton paid little heed to her ladyship’s version. What mattered it to her how it had all come about ! The

engagement she had sacrificed her honour, as recklessly as her money, to shiver was re-riveted firmer than ever. She did not know, it is true, what means her agent had used, but she never doubted that there had been foul play exercised to sow distrust between Harold and Grace Layton. Theodora Richeton was one of those bold, passionate natures that are grand either for good or evil. Until she had conceived this ill-starred love for Luxmoore, nothing could have been alleged against her, beyond that she had been *quelque peu coquette*. She had dashed the chalice from her lips in sheer wantonness, and, alas! found now that the goblet was shattered for aye! Fiercely she brooded over this new phase of the situation; and Harold would have shuddered could he have dreamed what thoughts now whirled through this distracted woman's brain. She had sent for Berkley Holt, and with all his *insouciance* that gentleman had

literally winced beneath the bitter invective of Theodora's jealous tongue. She had paced the room with flashing eyes and tempestuous step, and, hardened as he was, Berkley had been positively appalled by the mænadic magnificence of her wrath. He pleaded guilty, certainly, to having concealed the reconciliation of the lovers from her for some weeks, but urged, which was not the truth, that he still entertained hopes of once more separating them. Sharply questioned on this point, Berkley admitted that he did not quite see his way as yet, but doggedly maintained that he had done good service up to a certain point, that he had sown discord between the lovers successfully, and that as to how that had been eventually cleared up he was still in ignorance.

As the storm of her passion died away, Theodora was fain to admit this; but she dismissed Berkley with all her old haughtiness.

"Enough, Mr. Holt; when one has lost the game, we don't desire so much the apologies of our partner for his mistakes, as that we may never have him for our *vis-à-vis* in future. Henceforth, bear in mind, I will play my hand alone; and, remember, if I find it convenient to denounce you to your cousin, I shall do it without scruple."

"Yes; when one plays cards with a woman, one expects her to cheat, if she can. Be good enough to bear in mind, that when you denounce me, you denounce yourself. I have no intention of becoming a scape-goat."

"You need not be afraid, sir. If I pour forth the story of our joint shame, I am not likely to suppress my share in it. Ignorant though I have insisted on remaining of the mere details of the plot, I have no intention of shrinking from my share in the responsibility of it."

"By Jove!" muttered Berkley as he gained the street; "if ever I am weak

enough to mix myself up in a love intrigue, where the woman happens to be in earnest, I shall deserve to be shot. As for what that woman will do at present no mortal can conjecture. She might make a clean confession to Harold, or make a corpse of him, and, upon my soul, I shouldn't be altogether surprised if she took the latter view of the affair eventually. Possible she might take it into her head to make a corpse of Grace Layton. Quiet down, without a devil of a row with somebody, it can't be supposed she will; and I'll take thundering good care that somebody isn't me."

But Berkley was not quite correct in his views. If Theodora, in the first bitterness of her disappointment, had been sharp in speech to him, she was to some extent justified in so being. He, her heavily subsidised agent, had kept her ignorant of what she considered it to be of vital importance that she should know. She

had right to be angered with any one who so deceived her. And it was difficult to comprehend the passionate nature of this woman's love. It is not that our English women cannot love honestly, strongly, and truly ; but such wild, jealous love as Theodora Richeton's is more the attribute of the hot Southern races than of those with Scandinavian blood in their veins. The more she broods over the matter, the more convinced she becomes of her utter defeat. "Too late!" she mutters, "too late! I might have had all his love once, aye—had; but I shall never win it now. She has reclaimed him. Ah, one cannot sow suspicion a second time in the mind of a girl who has suffered as Grace Layton must have done. I should be a judge," she continued, with a low, hysterical laugh. "My God! Have I not suffered myself? Had I ever won Harold back to me, could any one have made me doubt his truth?"

He might have been as false as hell, and I had never believed it. What to do? One reads of such things; a Borgia would have swept a rival from her path right speedily, but I lack nerve and opportunity. No; I could not kill her, were she at my mercy this minute. What a puling love is mine, after all! Have I not read of women, who paled at no crime that gave the man they loved to their embraces, and shall I have less courage than they? Have not men staked body and soul for love ere now—and do not women stake it continually? What matter how ruin comes!—ah, what matter indeed?” moaned Theodora sadly. “I do but rave. I have played, and lost; naught left me now but to sit out this dreary farce we call Life. One thing I must do—bid Harold farewell. I cannot see him the prize of another: that is beyond me.”

Theodora Richeton rose, crossed the room, and seated herself at the davenport;

but, as the swell of the ocean bears testimony to the severity of the gale, so did her trembling hand bear witness to the storm that had raged within her. Once more that slightly hysterical laugh escapes, as her hand so shakes that writing is impossible. Again she rises, crosses into her bed-room, and, unlocking a small daintily inlaid cabinet, takes from it a cut-glass bottle, and measures out a stiffish dram of syrup of chloral. For some minutes she paces the room restlessly, but her excitement is such that the opiate is slow to take effect, and the nervous system is far from tranquillized. Once more she pours some water into the tumbler, then drops another dose of chloral into it. "Too much," she murmurs. "No; I will write first, and then, if I still feel so nervous and shaken, I will take it." Meanwhile she places the tumbler on the dressing-table, and returns to the boudoir. The drug has done something for her, and it is with steadier hand

considerably that she now takes up the pen, poor soul, to write what she knows is her last love-letter.

Woe's me ! but we have all penned such letters in our time, and thought they were the last ones. Till disease or death lay us low, we can be little sure of ourselves in such matters, and neither man nor woman ever believes really that they have passed the epoch of sentiment. There have been men, indeed, of threescore, who were, perhaps, more dangerous in the boudoir than they were at twenty; and women also, to whom men have done homage when their hair was grey.

But, here is a woman in all the glorious meridian of her beauty, sitting down to pen a farewell to the only man that ever touched her heart; sitting down to write such epistle with all the sad conviction that, but for her own reckless coquetry, she'd never have had to pour forth such sorrowful confession; making up her mind to dis-

guise little of the conspiracy she'd hatched against him, especially as far as her share in that conspiracy went. Now, in cases of this kind, it is in the nature of women, on discovery, to take either of two lines with all the force and subtlety they may be master of. The commoner, and I may say the meaner feminine nature would deny complicity to the last—deny it, aye, after the damning proofs were laid upon the table of arraignment; but the other, and higher, nature will actually revel to some extent in its own failure; will neither disavow, nor dissimulate, concerning its machinations; but glory in the confession of the reckless and unscrupulous game it has played. Such was Theodora Riche-ton's disposition. Convinced now that all was over, and her chance of being mistress of Harold's heart, or hand, utterly hopeless, she felt it imperative to renounce her pretensions—pretensions, by the way, of which he was quite unaware—in a farewell letter.

These last letters! What a terrible infatuation they are of humanity! I don't allude so much to those in which love's young dream is shattered, but to that extraordinary hallucination we all have for writing a last letter about anything we may be giving up, however unnecessary it may be: diffuse always of our reasons on such occasion, "as if," to quote wily Lord Chancellor Thurlow, "a wise man ever gave his reasons for anything." I wonder how many men have been argued out of backing the winner because they gave their reasons for doing so, while it is very seldom a man with a *penchant* for a loser has been talked out of his fancy.

Mrs. Richeton sits in front of her paper-case, but as yet puts no pen to paper. At present she still feels too shaken to pour out on paper the thoughts that overwhelm her. In her impatience at the slow action of the opiate, she springs from her chair, and takes a few steps in the

direction of her bed-room, then turns, and seats herself once more at the writing-table. A few minutes more, and the chloral begins to tell in its first stage. Her brain is whirling with vivid imaginings; the mad desire to throw herself at Harold's feet, and make passionate confession of her wrong-doing possesses her. She seizes the pen :—

“So my last hope is quenched. My last battle for your love has been fought, and ended in dire defeat. Grace Layton and you have come together again. Harold, she can never love you as I do—it is not in her nature; but she, doubtless, loves you well. For me, I would have sacrificed all to have attained what she has won. Would!—I have! My self-respect is gone. I have stooped to bribe, cajole, plot. I don't myself know exactly how it was done, but I do know that the misunderstanding between you and Grace

was produced at my bidding. You wonder that if it was so I am not ashamed to confess it. I answer—not one whit! Did I see opportunity I would sow distrust between you again this minute. I would sacrifice everything I hold dear in this world—wealth, friends, honour, position—to gain your love. I know now it can never be. I have striven hard, and employed means that make my cheeks tingle when I think of them, and yet I would do the same again, nor blush did they only prove successful. Friends forsooth! and could you, Harold, deem we might be that, and no more? I never deceived myself. It was to me a mere means to an end; an end, alas, that I shall never accomplish now.

“Rumour has it that your hands are to be tied on your marriage; that you are to take certain vows against betting, with those you take at the altar. I’d never have asked such pledge from you. I’d

have scorned a settlement. Had I but your love you might have gambled away, not only every shilling I possess, but the jewels from my ears, the rings from my fingers, and I'd never have blenched nor uttered word of reproach.

“I doubt whether Grace Layton can say as much. It is over. I threw away your love when it was at my feet, and my life's happiness besides. I will not say I can never meet you again, but it must be a long time first; and, after my confession, perhaps you will decline ever knowingly seeing me again. I am going abroad: if you can, write me one line to say you forgive me. You might do that in consideration of the wild love that prompted my treachery. Penitent? No—I cannot plead that; sad and sorrowful because I have failed, is all I can lay claim to. Good-bye, Harold; if we should never meet again in this world, think kindly as you can of one who, if she sinned against

you, yet so sinned, in virtue of the great love she bore you.

“Thine till death,

“THEODORA.

“One slight act of atonement :—If Berkley Holt can mar your chance at Epsom, remember, he always will.”

Theodora Richeton folded her note, and addressed it in the firm, regular characters that distinguished her handwriting, which was always somewhat masculine in type ; and, leaning back in her chair, she pondered over the past, and looked out on what seemed the dreary waste of the future. No pleasant imaginings, these ; to turn from the incalculable folly that had wrecked her life to the utter weariness that lies before her. Common enough that feeling of desolation spread over the days to come, when we meet a serious disappointment in our love affairs. Apt to think that the world is all askew, instead of that more

profitable belief, that our doll was stuffed with sawdust.

She closes her eyes, and tries to sleep. How often we would fain forget our sorrows and disappointments in this wise—

“For if ignorance be indeed a bliss,
What blessed ignorance equals this,
To sleep—and not to know it!”

But, no, it is useless; her interview with Berkley Holt still whirls through her brain. She pictures Harold and Grace Layton standing at the altar together. Rings in her ears the query, “Wilt thou take this woman for thy wedded wife?” etc. She is in that critical state when the nervous system has been so far excited that an ordinary sedative has ceased to act. The chloral, indeed, has proved an enemy in some sort. If it has somewhat steadied the nerves, it has also excited the imagination. She can endure it no longer; but, rising from her chair, walks quickly to her

bed-room. The tumbler, with its colourless contents, stands upon the dressing-table, with the little cut-glass bottle beside it. She measures out another fair dose of the opiate, and empties it into the tumbler, utterly oblivious that it already contains a similar quantity of the fatal drug, swallows it, and then, returning to her boudoir, drops quietly into an easy chair, and awaits the sleep she so craves. Two or three passages of her ill-starred love revolve like the bits in a kaleidoscope before her restless brain. She can remember the first night she was introduced to Harold, ah, so well! It was at a botanical *fête*; and, after the manner of botanical *fêtes*, the rain descended at midnight. How he insisted upon her putting on his overcoat, and faced the shower himself in his evening costume! What friends they became after that; and how well she remembered that evening in the conservatory at Mrs. Meddlicote's ball, when she first felt

assured that this was no mere flirtation, but that Harold loved her in earnest, aye, as none of them before had ever loved her ! She thought, then, over that mad afternoon, when she so stung him by her coquetry that he renounced her ; and again her thoughts wander back to the scene in which, for the first time, his lips met hers, and her heart sunk within her at the coldness of his kiss. Gradually the two scenes seem to blend into one, but no longer clear-cut and defined, but blurred and confused, like a bad photograph. She murmurs "Harold ! Harold ! my own—Good"—once or twice incoherently, then her head sinks back upon the chair, the long silken lashes droop, and Theodora Richeton is at rest at last.

The hours pass steadily by ; no sound breaks the stillness save the monotonous ticking of the timepiece. More than once does that ormolu chronicler sound the hour with musical chime, and yet Theodora

still lies in trance-like slumber. The afternoon shadows lengthen as the sun sinks low in the west, and yet the lady of the mansion sleeps on. The bright May sun glints in at the window, gilds her dusky tresses, and kisses her fair cheek lovingly; but the passion-strung woman lies still prostrate from her emotions and the chloral she has taken to allay them. Middle. Pepiton, the French maid, peeps cautiously in about half-past six, to remind her mistress that it is getting time to dress, but leaves the room on tip-toe for fear of disturbing her. Seven! chimes out from beneath old Time and the gilded cupids that guard the enamelled dial upon the mantel-piece, and still Theodora takes no heed. The half-hour arrives, and then Mademoiselle, peeping once more into the room, nerves herself to the awakening of her mistress. She could not describe it, but she was conscious as she crossed the room, that Theodora Richeton had been called by

One whose call we all bow meekly to. She looked for an instant into her mistress's calm face, touched her on the shoulder, and then, with a shudder, Mdlle. Pepiton took her mistress's hand in hers. It was dull, heavy, inert. Repressing the scream that rose to her lips by a tremendous effort, and dropping the hand, Pepiton sank into the nearest chair for a second to recover herself. She loved her mistress very devotedly, this French girl, and the blow for a moment stunned her; but she was a woman of great nerve and readiness. Once more she rose, placed her fingers lightly on her lady's pulse for a moment. Then, thrusting her hand into the bosom of Theodora's dress, she pressed it upon her heart.

"Dead! my God! dead!" she muttered. "I must ring for assistance, but, ah! I loved her well. One glance round before I do. A letter to Monsieur Luxmoore; I will take care of that. Do not fear, madame, that he shall not have it," she continued,

throwing herself on her knees, and covering the hands of her mistress with caresses ; “but you loved him with all your soul, and it is possible you might wish no other eyes but his to see this.”

Then the girl rose timidly, pressed a kiss on the proud lips, which, whatever they might have been to others, had ever been kind to her, and rang the bell.

There was that usual consternation amongst the servants which always characterizes the class when the Destroyer enters their abiding place. Doctors were sent for in hot haste in all directions, and within an hour four eminent physicians could certify that poor Theodora Richeton had died from an over-dose of chloral. The tumbler and the cut-glass bottle, still standing on the dressing-table, left no doubt about the cause of death ; while the extreme openness with which it had evidently been taken, coupled with Mdlle. Pepiton’s admission that her luckless

mistress habitually used it, induced belief that the fatal dose had been the result of accident, not design.

Yes! in the pride of her beauty—in all the magnificence of her guilt—Theodora had died for love, as truly, if not intentionally, as any heroine of classical story.

CHAPTER V.

DARLINGTON GETS THE KEY-NOTE.

IT was about ten days after the Two Thousand that Coriolanus began, as it is termed, "to go badly in the market." Backers of horses for a big race are exactly in the position of dabblers in foreign stock, and the winner of the Two Thousand began to look financially as if investments concerning him were rotten as speculations in Turks, Russians, or Egyptians. It puzzled a good many people this; and more especially those most intimately connected with the stable. Mr. Plyant, the eminent bookmaker, for instance, was very much bewildered at

the aspect of the market, and could not understand the temerity of layers, who never seemed to tire of betting a little more against the favourite for the Derby. Harold Luxmoore and his *fidus Achates*, the Honble. Jim, had more than one animated discussion concerning it; and Laceby maintained, with unswerving steadiness, that somebody unknown, as Mr. Plyant had said, knew more about the Blithedown horses than he should do.

“Now, Harold,” said the Honble. calmly, “this fellow, whoever he may be, is the instigator of the opposition. You know from Darlington that the colt is as well as ever he was, and doing splendidly, and yet these men lay as if they knew him to be amiss. Of course, under these circumstances, they imagine they can pull the strings somewhere. Now, the question is—where? Whom connected with your stable is it they have bought? I don’t for one moment imagine

that it is Darlington; besides, if it is, we had better be in the swim, follow their lead, and lay against Coriolanus likewise. If your trainer is playing you false, it is not a bit of use trying to get at the bottom of the affair; but I don't think that. We must hear what Plyant says."

Mr. Plyant, upon being appealed to, professes himself utterly unable to elucidate the mystery. "It was difficult," said the bookmaker, "to ascertain exactly who it was got all the Two Thousand money; but I did make out that Mr. Holt, Goodman, Osgrove, and one or two more were the principal winners. The two latter are amongst the chief opponents of Coriolanus now; but how on earth any of that set can know anything about the Blithetown horses I cannot conjecture. They're not particular that lot, mind," concluded Mr. Plyant, cheerfully; "and, perhaps, have bought a stable-boy, or see their way into serving out the oats the last feed or two

before the Derby; but they undoubtedly lay as if they knew something. Still," continued the bookmaker, laughing, "I've known that division very busy driving in the nails, and the horse turn out by no means so dead as they thought him when the race was run."

Mr. Darlington, in possession of all this varied information from Harold Luxmoore, merely reiterates that Coriolanus is doing very well; observes that there never were such people for mares' nests as petty bookmakers; and that if there is anything wrong it is not at Blithedown. Further than the intimation that, if Coriolanus continues to do as well as he is at present doing, they need be afraid of nothing but The Felon at Epsom, Mr. Darlington declines discussion regarding the opposition to the favourite. But for all that, the trainer has not one whit shut his eyes to it; no one knows better than he that there is seldom smoke without fire in .

racing, and that relentless laying against a strong favourite, whose public performances thoroughly entitle him to that position, is indicative of something wrong. He knows his colt is wonderfully well and sound ; the question with Mr. Darlington then simply resolves into this : foul play is meant, probably ; but in what direction is it to be attempted ? Mr. Darlington dislikes confidants in all difficult, or, indeed, other situations, and determines to work this matter out for himself.

Now, Calvert and Dr. Slocombe had been hugely gratified, though not a little surprised, at the result of the Two Thousand. After what the doctor had seen at Challis's, after the extraordinary change in the betting at the last moment, they had come to the conclusion that there was little chance of the first big three-year-old event of the season falling to Blithe-down, and their exultation was tremendous when the telegram bore the news of

Coriolanus's victory. But when they perused the sporting papers of the next week they found that Mr. Luxmoore and his friends had won a comparatively small stake, in consequence of the market having been forestalled. "Doubtless," quoth the *Turf Chronicle*—"in consequence of intelligence of the great Blithedown trial having leaked out prematurely."

Mr. Calvert and the doctor shook their heads over this ; and then discussed the matter for some days. They came to the conclusion that the probability was the traitor in the stable was Sam Burton.

"Depend upon it, that's the beggar with the gabbling tongue, doctor. You saw him, thick as thieves, with that blackguard Berkley Holt, in London, and you may bet your life you're right. We know all about it now ; and it wasn't their game to stop our horse this time, because Lacedemonian had stopped himself, and they got first run of the market about Coriolanus ; but,"

continued Mr. Calvert, solemnly, "Coriolanus being now first favourite, they will, probably, just reverse these tactics for the Derby."

"Quite agree with you," rejoined the doctor. "Now, the question is, had I better post off to Mr. Luxmoore, and tell him all I know?"

"I think not," replied the stud-groom, meditatively. "He's young at it, you see, and rather impulsive; then they *do* say that all that business with Miss Layton is to come off, after all, and when a man's sweethearting, doctor, he ain't to be relied on, you know; especially when the girl is as bright, pretty, and winsome as the squire's young lady. No, doctor, I tell you what it is. I think I'd best just run up and have a chat with Darlington."

"What do you think of consulting Mr. Laceby?" inquired the doctor. "He's a cool hand, unless report belies him."

"No; I've thought of that," replied the

stud-groom, caressing his chin musingly. "You're quite right, Mr. Laceby is both clever and cool ; but he would think himself bound to tell Mr. Luxmoore the story. Now, you may take your oath Darlington will tell no one what he thinks, or means to do ; but I fancy he's quite equal to the occasion."

"Of course, Calvert—you're quite right ; stupid of me not to think of it. Darlington's the man ought to know all this ; and from all accounts there is no one more fitted to cope with any roguery of the kind. We want to see the black and crimson hoops triumphant at Epsom, don't we ? and we won't bother Darlington about how he means playing his hand, and let him be reticent as he likes."

The doctor said this with intention. He knew that the trainer's rigid silence concerning the stable tactics at times rather wounded the *amour propre* of the stud-groom, and he was anxious that nothing

of this kind should interfere to prevent Darlington being thoroughly in possession of the story of Sam Burton's extreme intimacy with Berkley Holt.

Calvert looked at him for a moment before he answered—"Don't be afraid, doctor, he shall be told all we've learnt, fair and square, and I shan't expect him to say a word in reply. Damme, he may be dumb as a cod-fish, if he'll only score a Derby for the Grange paddocks in May."

Mr. Calvert was off next day for Blithedown, where he duly arrived, much to the astonishment of Mr. Darlington and his wife.

"I don't know what the deuce has brought you, Calvert; but the missus will be real glad to see you, as I am. You'll see my roses all in bloom too. As you didn't choose to announce yourself, you must take us as you find us; but Maggie's not a woman to be put out, nor taken aback."

"He must have known I was within hearing," laughed Mrs. Darlington, as she came in to welcome her unexpected guest. "Very glad to see you, Mr. Calvert; as for your room, it will be ready for you in a quarter of an hour, and for dinner—well, you must do as Tom habitually does—rough it. You may be sure he don't submit to roughing it very much; at all events I never venture to try the experiment."

"Quite content to rough it at Blithedown," laughed the stud-groom. "I know all the hardships in store for me. I've tried 'em before, and nearly had an attack of the gout in consequence. Awful times here, ma'am, no doubt, just now," continued Mr. Calvert, with mock gravity. "A Two Thousand just landed, and the Derby in prospect—what can we expect beyond bread and cheese? Bonnets, indeed! I suppose you have to go to church with a shawl over your head."

Mrs. Darlington's laugh rang out clear

and strong. "You were right Mr. Calvert. Coriolanus 'meant bonnets,' and Mr. Luxmoore was very liberal to us over 'the Guineas;' considering he was forestalled, and won but little himself on the result, quite out of the way so. We do hope to bring off the Derby; and I really think, unless The Felon proves too good for us, we shall."

Dinner over, and Mrs. Darlington having retired to bed, after her usual gossip, leaving her husband and Mr. Calvert to discuss a final pipe, and indulge in a little racing talk, the latter quietly narrates his story to the trainer. It was not often Mr. Darlington suffered himself to betray emotion, but when he heard of that little dinner at Challis's, he ejaculated, "By G—d! I see it all now."

Mr. Calvert stopped; and evidently waited for his host to further disclose himself; but Mr. Darlington, after a pause of a few minutes, merely remarked—

“ You’ve given me the key-note, Calvert, and I understand where we are. I never talk, and indeed, couldn’t, if I would, at present. I’ve got to think this out ; but don’t you be afraid ; if the black and crimson hoops are not bowled over by The Felon, Blithedown takes first honours at Epsom this year, in spite of any juggling of Mr. Berkley Holt.”

In possession of Mr. Calvert’s story, the Blithedown trainer feels that he can, in some measure, account for the opposition that has set in the last three or four days against Coriolanus. He thinks that he understands what his antagonist’s tactics are, for Mr. Darlington has made very special inquiries indeed into who may be the owner or owners of The Felon. The mask of Mr. Podmore defied him for a little, but he speedily reflected that, for a twenty-pound note, the estimable Joe Milton would sell any such petty information as that. Mr. Darlington was at no

loss to find an agent who, for a little douceur on his own account, was quite content to arrange this transaction; and therefore the trainer knew pretty well who the firm were that were connected with the horse. Consequently, when he heard Calvert's story, Mr. Darlington summed up the situation in this wise: "They've bought, or, at all events, think they can buy, Sam Burton, which means buying Coriolanus, the only horse they're afraid of. Of course, their game is to lay against our colt, which they imagine they hold safe, and win with their own. There is no hurry; but, before the race, I think Mr. Luxmoore will have to 'carpet' Sam."

CHAPTER VI.

CORIOLANUS SETTLED.

COULD Mr. Calvert or Doctor Slocombe have sat in the coffee-room at Challis's just a week after the Two Thousand Guineas, they would have found much food for conjecture, and been as full of suspicion as Lady Suntowers of sorrow for the backslidings of her friends and acquaintances. At a table covered with decanters, and bearing the relics of a most excellent dinner, were seated Sam Burton and Berkley Holt. The flushed face of the jockey bore evidence that he had drunk freely, while even Holt, in the exceeding glitter of his eye, showed that, like his companion, he had been no shirker of the

wine cup. But his seasoned head was far more than a match for that of his companion, and the wine that had shaken the strength of purpose of the jockey had simply nerved Berkley Holt.

Since he had betrayed the secret of the Two Thousand trial, and had seen what came of it, Sam Burton had felt that he had delivered himself over to these new masters, body and soul. They had been liberal. He had been presented by Berkley with a handsome purse, subscribed, as Mr. Holt sarcastically told him, "by the friends of the horse;" and Sam reflected, somewhat ruefully, that "these friends" were men who had no connection with the stable, but who had made the money, through his own babbling indiscretion, that his employer and intimates ought to have done. Most skilfully and artistically, too, was he made to understand by the men into whose hands he had now fallen, that he was so fatally compromised with them,

that it was hopeless for him to do anything adverse to their interests ; that if he did not comply with their requirements, where they got their intelligence concerning the Two Thousand would be assuredly noised abroad. This was not coarsely put to him, nor roughly put to him ; neither was it all instilled in one dose. It was dealt out by winks, innuendoes, stray sentences, a word here, a word there ; never anything that a man, especially a morally weak man, could grapple with. His friend Holt seemed to assume that henceforth all he knew about the Blithe-down horses would be quite at their disposal ; and sometimes playfully hinted that, perhaps, some of these days he might be able to do even a little more for them. He sometimes kicked at the bit thus thrust into his mouth, but Messrs Larcher and Co. were men cunning of fence, and it would have required a tougher moral texture than Sam Burton's to shake them

off. In the meanwhile the jockey found his new friends lavish of their hospitality, upon such occasions as he appeared in town; extremely glad to see him, and, indeed, constantly sending invitations to him for banquets, followed by boxes at the theatre, down to Newmarket. But, although Messrs Goodman, Osgrove, and Larcher had all made his acquaintance with much effusion, they evinced no disposition to be seen in public with him. Only that Sam was sometimes obstinate, they would never have even celebrated these little dinners at Challis's. A private room at Kettner's, or the Pall Mall, seemed more advisable in their estimation. At the theatres, too, they usually affected the back of the box, and had a way of disappearing, before the end of the performance, on errands of profound, though mysterious, importance. Even Berkley Holt, who was generally left alone with him on such dramatic exploration, in-

variably manifested much fidget to get away before the end of the performance. Sam Burton is not altogether unconscious of this; but he is in the position of a man who, in a moment of weakness, and half unwittingly, has committed a fraud upon his employers, of which some of his unscrupulous companions are cognizant.

It is true that in days gone by there had been, aye, and fairly, strong suspicions about Burton's honesty, but he has lived these down, and wiped out the past by a long course of straightforward and meritorious service. Now, like the fly in the web of the spider, like the unfortunate, whose forged acceptance is in the hands of the ruthless bill discounter, Mr. Burton begins to reflect that his actions are no longer at his own discretion. He knows perfectly the enormity of his offence; that he, the accredited jockey of the Blithedown stable, and, placed upon the trial horse, has divulged the results of the contest;

and he knows now, that unless he consents to continue to play traitor, his new friends will sacrifice him without scruple. A good man, writing a goody book, might introduce here a sermon about passing over that first step ; but on the turf we prefer a good beginner, even if he gets off the wrong way ; and this is rather what has happened to Sam Burton. "He has got off the wrong way," and Messrs. Holt and Co. have no intention of allowing him to stop. It was his vanity and facile disposition that led him astray in the outset of his career ; it is precisely the same qualities, supplemented by a weakness for champagne, that are proving fatal to him now. Sam Burton is perfectly convinced in his own mind that he is a five pound better horseman than any man in England. Now, it could certainly not be alleged that there were—

"Within the realm
Ten thousand good as he."

But it is certain that a few of his compeers were quite his equal.

Berkley Holt has thoroughly mastered this weakness, and plays upon it with the dexterity related of Paganini, whom tradition credits with more compass on one string than has ever been achieved before or since.

"We'll have coffee here, Sam," observed Berkley, touching the bell, "and, as we've got the room to ourselves, I don't suppose at this time of night they'll mind our lighting a cigar. I want to talk to you."

"We've been talking a goodish few. What's up now, guv'nor?" replied Mr. Burton, as he accepted a biggish and blackish Cabana from his host.

"Well, to begin upon, of course you can do what you like with a horse. When Blithedown puts up a jockey like you, they don't bother you with orders. They simply say 'Our money's on, Sam; win.' That's about what they do, I take it.

"That's what they would do, if they'd an ounce of sense, of course; but they don't. Look at the Champagne, now, at Doncaster last year. 'You wait on Beggarman, and come with one run at the finish,' says Darlington. Who ever heard of waiting in a T.Y.C. spin, if you get well off? If I had been allowed to come right through that time, The Felon would have never caught me."

"I suppose not," replied Berkley, toying with his coffee; "and what do you mean to do at Epsom? Depends, I suppose, on what they put you up on."

"Can't depend much upon that," replied the jockey, sharply. "If they talked about anything but Coriolanus, it isn't likely I'd ride. As they say in the 'drayma,' I'm retained for 'first business,' and don't do 'utility parts.'"

"True. Your cigar's out, by the way," said Berkley, politely pushing the matches across. "How shall you ride Coriolanus, then?"

“Oh come, I say, Mr. Holt,” retorted Sam Burton, with a knowing wink, and sucking hard at his cigar, “that’s rather a leading question ; but I’ll make a mess of that Felon of yours.”

“That’s very likely. You’ll ride the one horse we’re afraid of, and we must break your heart if possible. Our colt will stay every yard of the course, never fear. Have a glass of curaçoa ?”

“Just so. That’s the tip ; just hurry John up. Yes, you’re right, your colt can stay, but they’re bound to give me something to help me along up to Tattenham Corner, and I’ll beat you fair and square from that, run it which way you will—whether I wait or come right away. Coriolanus can both gallop and last. I’ll bet you just a sovereign I’ve the heels of your colt in the Derby ?”

“Never mind that. Ah, here’s the curaçoa, and dev’lish good tippie too. Brandy, John ; just try a cross of cognac

with it. Your cigar's out again, by the bye," and once more Holt pushed the matches across to his guest.

"No; too beastly strong altogether, these weeds of yours," rejoined the jockey, as he threw the remainder of his tobacco into the fire. "I'll try one of my own."

"Deuce of a pity, Sam, we can't all swim in the same boat," remarked Berkley, meditatively.

"What do you mean?" inquired Mr. Burton, sharply, as he ignited one of his own Cabanas.

"Well, it's a pity, The Felon and Coriolanus are not in the same stable, so to speak."

"That's so," replied Mr. Burton, with a slight hiccough. "I could win upon which you liked then, you know."

"Well," said Berkley, with a somewhat forced laugh, "it's possible, you see, for an artist like you—not a muff—to accomplish the reverse of that, even as it is."

"Don't understand you," rejoined Burton, with increase both of hiccough and gravity.

"A horseman like you—mind, I don't say any one could—but a horseman like you could lose upon which we liked, without a soul being a bit the wiser."

"I say, that sounds uncommon like ro——"

"Hear me," interposed Berkley, hastily, "and don't talk nonsense. I tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you a level thousand Coriolanus beats The Felon in their places, and put up five hundred of the money now; the remainder of the money to be paid after the race."

Of course a more glaring case of buying a jockey there could not be, diplomatically as it was couched.

Sam Burton threw his cigar once more into the fire, and, leaning his head upon his hands, seemed to reflect.

"That's hardly good enough," he observed at length.

"No, quite right. I must bet you the other five hundred Coriolanus beats The Felon wherever they finish;" and, as he spoke, Berkley took a note-case from his breast pocket, and leisurely counted out five hundred pounds. Leaving the sheaf of notes upon the table, he rose, and saying, "I just want to look at my betting-book for a moment," strolled over to the nearest gas jet. When he came back, the little sheaf of notes had disappeared.

"Just initial those bets, Sam," remarked Holt, quietly.

"I don't like bets of that description down, Mr. Holt," replied Burton, gruffly.

"Look! they're entered quite short, and I mean tearing the page out and putting it away directly I get home, but we must have some slight memorandum of the transaction."

The jockey placed S. B. against the two brief entries, and Holt, laughing, said, "Well, Sam, here's success to Coriolanus, and good-night."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HONBLE. MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE Derby fever has set in, and rages with more or less severity throughout the country ; very prevalent and riotous in London, more especially amongst the clubs, the *habitués* of which appear to have racing studs kept for their peculiar amusement. The members that, judging by their own account, are in accord with all the great stables of the turf, settle the thing about half a dozen times a day. On the steps of the Rag, in the bay window of White's, in the card-room of the Marlborough, accounts of trials are buzzed about with unwearying persistency ; and, as usual, there are so

many that "can't lose," it becomes difficult to imagine how anything *can* win. The "Hædulus" is shockingly infected with this annual epidemic, and the younger members not only lunch with gaudy betting-books open before them, but retire into solitary corners, and give themselves up to severe study, in the laudable endeavour to come to some sort of understanding as to how the result of their pencillings may affect them under varied possible aspects of the great struggle.

Down at Liddington, the disease has broken out with much malignancy. Scarce a shopkeeper in the place but what has got his modest wager on Coriolanus. At the beer-shops the labourers club shillings, with which to support the black and crimson hoops. At the King's Head, as may be well supposed, the doctor, Mr. Calvert, the hostess, and some few more, never tire of discussing the subject. Of course, they had all backed the son of Veturia for a

little ; and why he must win, and why it is altogether impossible that he should lose, is a subject debated nightly with unflagging interest. Calvert had given Dr. Slocombe an account of his interview with Darlington, and the two had agreed there was no more to be done in the matter of Berkley Holt.

“ I think, Calvert,” said the doctor, with a chuckle, as he rubbed his hands, “ that we may trust our esteemed friend at Blithedown to hold his own against any two Berkley Holts. You were quite right ; he was the man to acquaint with what I saw.”

“ I think so, doctor, I think so ; but it’s curious that Coriolanus doesn’t become a better favourite. On the contrary, he seems to lose ground rather in the betting, and it looks as if not only The Felon, but Ptolemy, would pass him in the quotations before long.”

“ Never mind how they bet about him,” chimed in Nancy Hamper, with all the

implicit credulity common to her sex when they have staked their belief on anything ; “we’ll ring the bells about it before many days are gone, never fear ; and you’ll see me pretty smart at church, a Sunday or two afterwards.”

“What ! you’re well on, Nancy ? ” laughed the doctor.

“Yes ; I put my two sovereigns out in good time, and so got a liberal bet laid me.”

Mr. Larcher drops in at the King’s Head occasionally, and manifests much interest in the prospects of Coriolanus. “Not,” as he deprecatingly remarks, “that he knows much about racing, but when the place you live in is identified with either a man or a horse of notoriety, you cannot help feeling some interest in either his or its career.”

To which oily expression of the attorney’s sentiments, Dr. Slocombe muttered, “Fudge ! ” in an undertone, and further

expressed his opinion confidentially to the stud-groom, "that the alterative had yet to be invented which would bring the truth out of the speaker."

Dr. Slocombe, indeed, with some recollection of catching a glimpse of the attorney at Newmarket, had once taxed him with having been present at the Middle Park Plate; but Mr. Larcher had denied his presence there emphatically, though for what reason it would have been difficult to say. Plotting, scheming men, or at times, merely mysterious men, will resolutely refuse to admit the having been at a place on occasion, simply because they regarded themselves there as *incognito*, and determinedly object to having this imaginary veil removed. The sole result of Mr. Larcher's denial of his having been at Newmarket is to make Calvert, and Dr. Slocombe especially, wonder what object he can have in his denial of the circumstance, for that he did see the

attorney there the doctor feels tolerably certain.

Meanwhile the sad tragedy that has taken place in Park Lane gets whispered about the London world, and society, with bated breath, relates, and listens to, how syrup of chloral has claimed another victim. Unfeignedly shocked is society, for the most part, to hear that proud and handsome Theodora Richeton is no more. How such a terrible catastrophe could have occurred is, for the most part, easily explained. The unfortunate lady had suffered from nervousness and hysteria, and had been in the habit of using the fatal remedy, an overdose of which caused her death. The world generally accepted this version of poor Theodora's sad ending; but it was not likely that dear old Lady Suntowers would fail, on such an occasion, to promulgate a version of her own concerning it. According to her

ladyship, and the weird sisterhood among whom she was a recognized chieftainess, Mrs. Richeton had committed suicide in consequence of her heavy losses during the recent Newmarket Meeting. It was in vain that Theodora's friends hotly protested against this story; the scandal gained much ground, as it was bound to do, for the public are always, in such cases, more ready to believe the story of suicide, from sensational causes, than the more prosaic version of an overdose of opiate by mistake. The Honble. Jim, it is true, ventured to remonstrate with Lady Suntowers pretty sharply, but the dear old lady was too bitter of tongue for him to cope with, and so exercised him, that the Honble., for once in his life, went near losing his temper, and retorted "that she had slain reputations enough: it was time she took to her devotions, and laid down the hatchet."

The lady only smiled grimly as she

said, "My dear Mr. Laceby, I must make my atonement first. I shall defend people's characters in future, and will begin with yours."

"God forbid!" muttered the Honble. Jim, as he retired, discomfited, and with the melancholy conviction that, in his endeavour to shield Theodora's memory, he had but further embittered the tongue of the bitterest scandal-monger of the day.

In Grosvenor Gardens there was unfeigned sorrow at the intelligence. Gracie reproached herself bitterly for her jealousy, and the family generally laboured under the feeling that they had not behaved well of late to Theodora Richeton. They called to mind how intimate they had once been with her, and the sisters especially remembered what a charming, graceful woman they had thought her in the first days of their acquaintance. Then, of course, came that gradual cooling of the intimacy consequent upon Gracie's engage-

ment. The girl might blame herself now her rival was dead, but I fancy few young women in her position but would have felt some repugnance to being on friendly terms with one who had so lately occupied a similar place in Harold's regard. But all such feelings are whelmed in the dread majesty of death; and Gracie could not but think she had been somewhat unjust to Theodora Richeton. Were she in possession of all the facts, she might fairly acquit herself of that charge, as we know.

A bright afternoon towards the middle of May, and Jim Laceby, sauntering up Grosvenor Gardens, knocks at the Laytons' door. In reply to his inquiry "if any one is at home," he is informed that Miss Layton is in the drawing-room, where he is accordingly ushered.

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Laceby," exclaimed Annie, as she rose to welcome him. "Mamma and Gracie are out shopping, and papa, of course, not returned

from the hive where he and the other bees make money for us drones to spend ; so you must accept me for your hostess."

"Perfectly satisfied," replied the Honble., as he dropped leisurely into an arm-chair. "I am always quite content with you to talk to me."

"Talk *with*, you mean," rejoined Annie, laughing.

"No, I don't, or else I should have said so. I'm a phenomenon—a man who likes to be talked to. Most fellows, you know, want to talk themselves, I don't. I'd always much rather be talked to ; and there's nobody can do it so pleasantly as you."

"Upon my word, Mr. Laceby," retorted Annie, "if you were not privileged, I have fair pretext for being angry. Don't you know we expect you to amuse us ?"

"Just so ; and that's how we bore you. It is such a delightful change for you when we expect to be amused, that you go in for it *con amore*. Besides, you know, we so

often fail; and, of course, when you take that *rôle*, we never can allow you to discover any failure. No; there are so many people in society wanting to be funny—to tell stories, and display their conversational powers, that, depend upon it, a fellow who only wants to listen must be popular. That's my line, and I am popular."

"Yes; and abominably lazy," cried the girl, with a merry laugh. "Why, you can talk better than most people, when you choose to take the trouble."

"Beg pardon, but your opinion is erroneous. One thing more, whether you think it or not, for Heaven's sake, never tell any one sō."

"I shall keep that as a sword of Damocles suspended over you. If ever you offend me, I shall publish it to the world."

"You're all wrong, you know," replied Jim. "I'm not clever, and I'm doosid glad I'm not. These clever people get into

everlasting scrapes from overweening confidence in themselves. Stupid beggars like me think so much about a big jump, that we generally wind up by going round by a gate."

"What a happy illustration!" observed the young lady with mock gravity; "and to be made," she continued, "by the man who set the field at Throughton Lock last November, and caused envy and uncharitable feeling throughout all North Bloomshire."

"Proves my case," retorted the Honble. "Nobody but a fool, under the influence of curaoa, would have done that. Gad! I think they must have given the horse curaoa too, or he'd have had more discretion."

"It was a very big jump, wasn't it?" inquired Miss Layton.

"Please don't remind me of my folly."

"But it was a big jump?" persisted the girl.

"Yes; which was due and sufficient reason for avoiding it."

"They say it is better to judge men by their deeds than their speech, Mr. Laceby, and in your case one would form a very mistaken idea of you, if one went by your own account of yourself."

"How so?" asked Jim, lazily.

"If one believed you, one would have to consider you idle, selfish, prudent to the verge of fogyism, wanting in nerve, determination, and decision, dull of thought, and deficient in conversation.

"Just so," replied Jim, "barring I have a little nerve, and am not out of the way selfish."

"How dare you do yourself such injustice?" retorted the girl, sharply. "Did you show any indolence, selfishness, or want of decision in Gracie's business?"

"Heaps of selfishness," replied Jim, quietly. "Great object to me, you know, to keep two pleasant houses I frequented

comfortable. As for the decision, it was yours. As for the trouble, well, that's all done with now."

"Indeed it is not. I shall never forget the tact, promptness, and good nature with which you carried out what you evidently thought merely a girl's fancy at the time. It's not likely either that Gracie and Harold will ever fail to remember who it was that brought them together again."

"Of course not, and that was you. We should none of us forget you, Annie, even if you hadn't displayed the gift of second sight. Suppose I ought to call you Miss Layton, by the way?"

"If you dare," laughed the girl, menacing him with her fan.

"Well, I've called you Annie since your sugar-plum days, so Miss Layton does come awkward. How long ago's that, by the way?"

"Ages, decades ;—I don't know. Ten years have passed and gone, as they say

in romance, since you presented me with burnt almonds, an unmanly tampering with my affections that you should still have compunctions about."

"Just so," replied the Honble., languidly. "You were always susceptible to bribery, and there were few misdemeanours you wouldn't have committed for a pound of gingerbread nuts."

"Never mind that. You used to think it your duty to get me out of scrapes in those days. Now——"

"You never get in 'em, of course," interrupted Jim, with an undefined idea that their conversation was verging on the sentimental, and that Annie Layton, in her well-fitting silken robes, was a most dangerously-attractive girl.

"And supposing I did?" she retorted with a little *moue*.

"Well, of course, you know, there be lots of other fellows only too anxious to——"

"But supposing there weren't lots of

fellows only too anxious to—" she retorted, mimicking him.

"Well then, naturally I should come to the rescue again," replied the Honble.

"Ah! you still think it your duty to take care of me, then; that is satisfactory. I will give you some tea now, if you like," and so saying, Miss Layton rang.

"But, even as she did so, the door opened, and Mrs. Layton, Gracie, and Luxmoore made their appearance.

"So tired, and literally hungering for a cup of tea, Annie," exclaimed the *fiancée*. "We've been roaming—that is, shopping—and when I tell you I am a-weary, and that mamma's a-weary, you may judge in what state poor Harold is."

"Very bored, Harold, eh?" inquired Miss Layton, laughing.

"Yes," replied her sister, "though he's too civil to say so; but I've promised he shall never be a victim again, and I shall keep my promise, for the best of all possible reasons."

"And that, Miss Gracie?" inquired the Honble.

"Is the danger, Mr. Laceby, of boring any one, much more one's husband."

"She's displaying unusual married intelligence, isn't she?" rejoined Miss Layton—a remark which brought the blood into her sister's cheeks, and made Harold and the Honble. smile.

"Have you heard anything about the Derby betting this afternoon, Jim?" inquired Luxmoore.

"Very little; but Coriolanus don't go well in the market, I'm told."

"He'll go over Epsom Downs in a way that will make his opponents pretty sick," rejoined Harold grimly.

"We hope so," replied Laceby; "but I'll own I should feel more comfortable if there wasn't such a disposition to bet against him."

"But our horse is quite well, Harold, isn't he?" said Gracie, as she leant over the back of her betrothed's chair.

"Perfectly. I'd a line from Darlington this morning, and he said the whole string were doing wonderfully well."

At this moment the door opened, and Mr. Layton made his appearance.

"Ah, Luxmoore; glad to see you. Nothing wrong with Coriolanus, I hope, really; but they've driven him back a point or so in the betting this morning."

"The horse is well enough, and they won't kill him with the pencil," rejoined Harold, laughing.

The Honble. said nothing. He didn't at all like the aspect of affairs at present, and, in spite of Luxmoore's dictum, thought it was quite possible that they would kill Coriolanus with the pencil; or, in other words, that the bookmakers would not lay, as it was apparent they were doing, without something to go upon. What that something might be was beyond him. In short, if he had not been so interested in the event, he would have summed up the situa-

tion in this wise, from past experience :
“The horse is well, can win, and is meant to win by his owner ; but for all that he won’t. The layers know all about the weak place. We don’t.”

“I shall be so glad when it is over,” said Gracie in a low tone to her lover. “I declare I can’t sleep for thinking of the stake you have on it—of all you are going to give up for me.”

“I am going to give up nothing,” replied Harold ; “thanks to Coriolanus. Don’t imagine but what you’ll have to do the honours of the old Grange yet.”

“I hope so, for your sake.”

“Now,” said the Honble., struggling out of his arm-chair with visible reluctance ; “I’m eastward bound. Are you for the Reunion, Harold ? Going to display all that energy and determination, you know,” continued Jim, turning to Miss Layton, “by tumbling into the first hansom I come across.”

"You don't impose upon me," rejoined Annie, smiling. "I know better. Why do you so persistently malign yourself?"

"Stops other people, you see, as a rule. Lady Suntowers, of course, is an exception. Dear old woman, nothing but death would stop her!"

"Come along, Jim," said Luxmoore, shaking hands with his host, and in another minute the two were descending the staircase.

They walked along in silence for some time, each buried in his own reflections. The Honble. was thinking how very pretty Annie Layton had looked that afternoon, and what a pleasant girl she was to talk to, or rather to be talked to, according to his own pet theory. Suddenly he was aroused from his reverie by Luxmoore, who exclaimed, "I'm going straight home, Jim, and this is my way. You, I suppose, are bound for the Reunion?"

"Yes. I just want to have a look at the evening papers before I dress."

"I suppose you think the layers of odds imagine they've got Coriolanus, eh?"

The Honble. nodded. "There's some of them under that impression, I suspect."

"What would you do?"

"Nothing. You've two clever men, I believe, working for you—Plyant and Darlington. If they don't discover from what quarter danger threatens between this and the day, I shall be both surprised and disheartened. For the present, good-bye."

Luxmoore walked sharply on to his rooms. Upon his arrival there his valet informed him that Mrs. Richeton's late maid was waiting to see him.

"Waiting to see me? What can she want? Show her in."

A few minutes, and Mdlle. Pepiton, dressed in deep mourning, was ushered into the room.

"Well, Pepiton," said Luxmoore, gently, "what is it? Can I be of service to you in any way? Nobody could have been

more shocked than I was when I heard of your poor mistress's sad end."

"Thanks, Monsieur, but I do not require assistance, nor could I accept it at your hands. I loved my mistress. She might be quick of tongue and temper to others, but never to me. I have come to do what I believe would have been her bidding could she have given me the order, namely, to place this letter, the last she ever wrote, in your hands. When, alas! I found her dead, this letter, directed to you and sealed, was upon the writing-table. I thought that she would not wish all the world to see what she may have said to you—for she loved you well, Monsieur—so I slipped it into my pocket till such time as I could bring it to you;" and with this the Frenchwoman handed Theodora's letter to Luxmoore.

He took it, balanced it uneasily on his fingers for a minute, and then replied, "Thank you, Pepiton. I believe, as you

say, that if your mistress could have spoken, this would have been what she wished, although, of course, I have no idea of the contents of it. I don't know why you should think badly of me; but for the sake of her who has gone, I shall be always glad to befriend you, if I can."

"Monsieur is very good," replied the girl; "but it could not be. I would starve before I took help from hand of yours!"

"In God's name, why?" exclaimed Harold.

"You killed my mistress!" returned Mdlle. Pepiton, in a deep, stern whisper, and then, with a low curtsy, she quitted the room.

Harold broke the seal, and, with tearful eyes, read poor Theodora's wild, passionate confession. He could but grieve over the sad fate of the hapless woman he had once loved so well. Her mad attachment to himself, and melancholy end, were, of course, extenuating circumstances in his eyes for

the bitter pain her schemes had occasioned both himself and Gracie, and in all the flush of their present happiness they might well forgive that, and he, at all events, had only tears and sad remembrances for the dead woman, and no wish to dwell upon the evil she had wrought him. He pays her the tribute of musing over the past till the time for keeping his dinner engagement has long gone by ; nor does he desist from staring into the embers—to speak metaphorically—till hunger carries him off to get something to eat at the nearest hostelry.

Jim Laceby dines by himself at the Reunion, and consumes his bottle of claret after dinner in solemn and deliberate manner. In the smoking-room, too, he is preternaturally silent, sucking at his cigar with tacit solemnity. He walks home by himself, and had there been any of his friends to observe him, it is probable they would have remarked, “Jim’s in for a big

think." As he puts his latch-key in the door, the Honble. pauses. "By Jove!" he mutters, "that's what's the matter. I've took it at last. I'm d—d if I'm not getting spoony."

CHAPTER VIII.

STEADYING THE FAVOURITE.

THE Honble. Jim is wonderfully taken aback by his recent discovery, and his reflections thereon are somewhat singular. "Well, we never can say what may happen to us," he argues with himself, "but if anybody six weeks ago had told me that I was about to commit the solecism of falling in love, I should have thought pretty cheaply of his powers of vaticination. But here I am, I who never had but one affair in my life, regular spoons on a girl whom I've known ever since she was in short frocks. It's rum, it's deuced rum," muttered the Honble. "Can't make out how it came

about at all. Wonder when it began—that's the devil of the complaint. By Jove! you never find out you've caught it for some weeks, and then it has got such a hold of your constitution it becomes difficult to shake off. Now, the question is, what am I to do? Of course I can't marry, even if the girl was willing, which isn't probable; looked upon me in a sort of avuncular light, I should fancy, all her life; sort of fellow she'd come and confide a love affair to, just as t'other one did her engagement to Harold. Pleasant, gad! yes, deuced pleasant position to find yourself in, when you've been and gone and done it on your own account. Well, it's no use thinking about it. I should be all adrift as a married man. Fancy having a regular hour for breakfast, and, by Jove! think of the candlesticks coming in about eleven. She's an awfully sweet girl, too, and he'll be a lucky fellow who gets her; d——n him. No; the best thing I can do is to

clear out as soon as this Derby is over. I'll go to Norway, and fish till I've recovered my senses, and Lord, how I do hate fishing! Anyway I'll go abroad somewhere. Hate going abroad too, till after Goodwood, but I can't go on like this, it isn't just to society. I should be making a similar exhibition of myself to Harold at Liddington last autumn, and, on my word, fellows are justified in cutting you when in that state."

After this Jim Laceby waxed rather shy of Grosvenor Gardens. I don't think it occasioned much observation among the family. In the month of May we do not pay much attention to our intimates dropping somewhat out of our circle. The great whirlpool is in full swing again, and engagements are rife and numerous; yet, for all that, Annie Layton did not fail to note how little they began to see of the Honble. compared to what they had been accustomed to do; for the house in Gros-

venor Gardens had been a lounge that Jim Laceby most especially affected, and it was rarely that he failed to drop in, just before park time, for half an hour's gossip some three or four times a week. Turning this over in her own mind, Annie wondered whether her last conversation with the Honble. could have had anything to do with it, and puzzled much as to what she could have said to offend him. Quite aware is Miss Layton that she had trenched on ground she had never touched before; and her cheeks flush slightly as she remembers that she had expressed herself in somewhat eulogistic fashion with regard to her companion's character and qualities. Annie begins to think a good deal about what can be the cause of their seeing so little of Mr. Laceby just now.

The Honble.'s perturbation of mind is really comical. He's rather put out at having to debar himself from a favourite lounge. He is much dismayed to find

what a gap there is in his life without Annie Layton to talk and ride with. He not only recognizes that he is in love, but that he is very much in love; and Jim Laceby really does consider this as a very serious misfortune. You see, the idea that he might marry never occurs to him for a moment. He has so completely regarded life from a bachelor point of view that it has never entered his head to change his state.

There is no reason he should not marry Annie Layton, providing the girl is willing to take him. In his thirty-eighth year, and with a couple of thousand per annum, Jim Laceby can perfectly afford the luxury of a wife, more especially should he win one so well dowered as Miss Layton is likely to be; but he never thinks of it in that light. He derides his own folly bitterly. He regards himself as a man smitten with an epidemic, of which it behoves him to get cured as soon as may be, and he believes

that change of air and scene are the most efficacious remedies ; but to take to himself the cause of his woe, and so terminate his sufferings, simply never enters the Honble.'s head. He would as soon think of turning Mahommedan as Benedict. His attack, indeed, was really playing the very deuce with the Honble. His potations of claret got deeper and deeper ; he smoked cigars bigger and blacker than are usually met with ; and grew so erratic in his whist, treating appeals for trumps, etc., with such indifference that his old card-table allies became puzzled as to whether it was the brain, or merely the memory, that was affected. One sagacious young gentleman, indeed, accounted for it by the theory that "Laceby has a Derby book, you see, that's a caution to look at. Backed Coriolanus, I believe, to win a fortune, and, considering the way that horse goes in the market, he may well be anxious."

The speaker had reason for what he

said. The Reunion men in some numbers were standing Coriolanus for the Derby, and the way that distinguished animal was being knocked about in the market was calculated to make his friends uncomfortable. Luxmoore frequented the Reunion a good deal, and had made no secret there, throughout the winter, that he had a real good colt in Coriolanus, and that the Middle Park running was all a *fasco*. Laceby, Herrick, and all Luxmoore's intimates, it was well known, were standing to win a good stake on the Blithedown crack; so that it is not to be wondered at that the Reunion, down to the hall porter, were "on to a man." Still, although the owner said his horse was never better, though he and his friends, largely as they had already backed him, still supported him, yet it was very curious how boldly and relentlessly the bookmakers laid against the horse. Mr. Plyant was aghast. He could not make out, as he said, "what they were going on."

"I know it's right," said the veteran commissioner; "I know the stable have backed it to win a raker, and are still backing it; and yet there's a gradually increasing division who lay as if they'd attended the horse's funeral. That lot connected with The Felon always seem to have a little more to put down against Coriolanus. If he wins, I've a strong suspicion we shan't see those chaps about for some time."

Keeping both his eyes and his ears open is Mr. Plyant, whether bustling about the Victoria Club, or meandering about the Subscription Room at Tattersall's, keen to pick up any hint to account for the extraordinary opposition shown to the Two Thousand winner, and occasionally putting a little money on Ptolemy on his own account. For it has occurred to Mr. Plyant that it is more than possible that the green and silver braid will be triumphant at Epsom, as he expresses it,

from "force of circumstances." "Darlington's clever, no doubt, but the money will never let Coriolanus win." That Berkley Holt and Co. would allow a favourite like The Felon to win, Mr. Plyant holds most improbable, and, with those two out of the race, he considers Ptolemy the best left in, and backs him accordingly.

Jim Laceby, earnestly meditating on his own difficulty in the morning-room of the Reunion, finds himself suddenly interrupted by Herrick, who demands, with emphasis, "What the deuce is wrong with Coriolanus?—do you know?"

"There's nothing wrong with the horse at present, Cyril," replied the Honble., "but, from the tone of the market, it looks as if there would be before the week's over. What form the attack will take it is impossible to conjecture, but that some of the bookmakers conceive the rite of inoculation to be at their discretion, is evident."

“Are you hedging?” inquired Herrick.

“No; dribbling a little more on. Want to know why? I’ll tell you what I believe to be the state of affairs, though, remember, I actually know nothing. I look upon it as Darlington and Plyant against a well-organized robbery. Of course, I go for right, justice, honesty, Harold, and Darlington, but most especially Darlington. Plyant, I know, is all abroad about the matter, but Darlington——” and here Laceby paused.

“Well, what about Darlington?” inquired Herrick, sharply.

“Says he never had such carnations as he’s grown this year. Harold and I are going down to see ’em next week, and, by the bye, I believe we try Coriolanus, if there is time; but, of course, one can’t do everything, and a real good carnation is ‘a thing of beauty,’ and a what-d’ye-call-it?”

“Confound it, you’re not going fooling around Darlington’s flowers when you’ve

got to try the winner of the Derby?" exclaimed Herrick, wrathfully.

"Can't say," replied the Honble., with most exasperating languor. "Depends upon Darlington, you know. He don't fool around, as you call it, much, but I hear his carnations are wonderful this year."

"D—n it, Jim, do talk sense! I've got a lot of money on these Blithedown horses."

"Backed 'em all round?" inquired the Honble., briefly.

"Yes, as a lot, and long shots about each of them singly. You and Harold have done the same, haven't you?"

"I have, but Luxmoore backed them as a lot for a long time. Coriolanus is the only one he ever backed singly."

"The only one likely to be any use; and there is evidently a dead set made against him," observed Herrick.

"Just so. Darlington says there is a prejudice both against his horses and his carnations."

“ Hang his carnations ! ” interposed Herrick.

“ Why ? Deuced good carnations, I’m told.”

“ What an aggravating beggar you are, Jim ! As if you or any of us cared a rap about Darlington and his cursed flowers.”

“ Excuse me ; I’m fond of flowers. Not got much sense of poetry, and all that sort of thing, you know,” said the Honble., “ but I like flowers—simple flowers—violets, geraniums, snowdrops, artichokes—no, I mean heliotropes, and all that sort of thing ; lovely, eh ? ”

“ Oh yes ; what a gardener you would make !—but about Coriolanus ? ”

“ I don’t know. Harold don’t know. Darlington, perhaps, does, but if he does, he’s not going to let any mortal soul into the mystery as yet ; and, my dear Cyril, a word in your ear. If Darlington don’t know, nothing ever was so dead as Coriolanus. It resolves itself into a case of the

trainer against the ring, or a section of it, and I'm standing the trainer."

"Well, I suppose I must also," rejoined Herrick, moodily. "I haven't much choice about it. If we put any hedging money into the market the colt will go back still more. However, next week will tell us something, I suppose."

"Yes; we are going to ascertain if Coriolanus retains his Two Thousand form, and, between ourselves, hear what Darlington has to say, I hope."

Herrick shook his head moodily, and walked away. He looked upon Darlington as likely to open his lips as the Sphinx, and, even if he did, that it would be probably in the same ambiguous fashion.

At the "Hædulus," too, Coriolanus is in bad odour; and Berkley Holt, in particular, is most relentless in his opposition to the hero of "the Guineas." In vain do Dick Layton and two or three more argue that he gave Ptolemy a 7 lb. beating in the Two

Thousand, that The Felon was only just beaten by Ptolemy in the Middle Park Plate when trying to give that weight away, and that, therefore, the two horses must be much of a muchness. Holt quite agrees with them, but is always willing to back The Felon against Coriolanus for either big sums or small, and has staked a considerable amount of money that the former beats the black and crimson hoops at Epsom.

Messrs. Goodman and Osgrove have been pacified with some difficulty by the intelligence that the Two Thousand winner has been bought, and that they may lay against him as if he was not even going to Epsom; but they still urged that The Felon should be treated in like manner, arguing, with a persistency and lucidity worthy of a better cause, that there never was such an opportunity of making money out of backers as this, when they virtually had the first two favourites for the great

race at their disposal. The redoubtable Joe Milton, indeed, was very much of that way of thinking. "Give me a certainty," says that worthy. "Now, you never can make quite sure of their winning, but when you train 'em, if you can't make certain of their losing, why, you don't know anything about your business,"—a branch of his profession, this, that Mr. Milton had cultivated with much assiduity; so much, indeed, as to have caused him rather a dearth of employers of late years.

But Berkley Holt, supported by the attorney, was resolute that The Felon was to do his best at Epsom, and their stronger natures overruled the will of their weaker partners. Berkley had, of course, confided to Mr. Larcher his cousin's chivalrous resolve, and the pair saw themselves in possession of a large racing establishment before a few weeks were over, allowing even for the necessary legal delay there would probably be before anything was

handed over to Holt. That they had already taken measures to make Luxmoore's winning the Derby impossible they felt assured ; still, in playing for so big a stake as Liddington, they were anxious to throw no chance whatever away, and therefore, considerably to the chagrin of Messrs. Goodman, Osgrove, and Milton, they had insisted that The Felon should be thoroughly prepared, and sent to do his best at Epsom. The coming into the Liddington Stud, with an ample income to support it, seemed to an inveterate gambler like Holt translation to Paradise. He and his accomplice, Mr. Larcher, contemplated a system of turf brigandage on a large scale, and much appropriation of the money of a confiding multitude weak enough to rely upon "public form." "We'll teach them what a variable thing it is, eh, Larcher, when we manage the black and crimson hoops?" observed Berkley, with a pleasant smile, such as a man might

wear who proposed conferring much benefit on his fellow-creatures.

He and the attorney were now on the best of terms again ; indeed, ever since that brief tussle for the mastery in Holt's chambers, the twain had got on very well together. Shrewd, cool, and calculating, Mr. Larcher saw then that the man in whose jaws he had deemed his hook was fast, had somehow slipped through his fingers. He accepted the situation at once ; he had meant to have been captain, but finding that impossible, and thoroughly recognizing Holt's talents and audacity, he at once determined to serve as his lieutenant, and Berkley found him invaluable in that capacity. Of what excellent villiany he was capable we have seen in his manipulation of the lover's correspondence, and that was by no means the sole service he had rendered since their partnership had arrived at an amicable footing.

It is Monday, the week before Epsom,

and Tattersall's is thronged. Much Derby gossip afloat, as may well be supposed, and more than one outsider takes up more prominent position in the betting in consequence of the outlay on his behalf. The Felon, now thoroughly established as favourite, is surprisingly firm, while his rival, Coriolanus, is most decidedly unsteady in the market. Men talk a good deal about the latter, and reasons innumerable are current to account for his doubtful position. "Cracked heels," "coughing," "showing temper," are all ascribed to him in turn, as cause for the disfavour with which he is regarded. Mr. Plyant, after much badgering, accepts five to a hundred about Coriolanus, and supplements it by taking a thousand to twenty about Beggarman, which latter proceeding being regarded as a species of dust-throwing in the eyes of the community, is met with some derision and laughter, and inquiries as to whether he had not better have

a little on Lacedemonian and Hypocrite also.

As the afternoon wears on, the disposition to bet against the Two Thousand winner is unmistakably on the increase, and yet none of the big bookmakers apparently are prepared to lay an enlarged price against the horse; but it is notable that to small sums six to one is obtainable, Coriolanus's most relentless opponents being Messrs. Goodman and Osgrove, and a section of small speculators, who apparently follow their inspiration.

Sitting on the bench in that little flagged enclosure outside the west-end of the subscription-room, his hat tilted over his eyes, and a half-burnt cigar smouldering between his lips, is Jim Laceby. The Honble. is apparently half asleep, and returns the greeting of his friends in slight, dreamy fashion, evincing evident desire that his thoughts or his slumbers shall not be interfered with.

"Well, Jim, the vultures apparently scent carrion," exclaimed Harold Luxmoore, as he came up and stood opposite him; "they seem much disposed to slaughter Coriolanus inside; in fact, I should not be surprised if they drove him to a comparative outside price before the room closes."

"Yes; they seem inclined to be liberal in their odds against the colt. Dare say you'll laugh, Harold, but I've been having a big think about the whole thing."

"And what conclusion have you come to, may I ask?" rejoined Luxmoore, laughing.

"A conclusion that will astonish our friends inside before they're half an hour older. I'm going to back Darlington. You know my opinion is that it is a case of the trainer now against some people unknown, who imagine they have the horse at their mercy. With fair play, I think he can win; although it will be a fine point

between him and The Felon, still, I think Coriolanus has just the turn of speed. Going to back him any more yourself?"

"Not till I've seen the result of the spin on Thursday," replied Harold, in a low tone. "Don't forget you're coming down to see that. Beastly early business; but it can't be helped. I've got a lot of money on the colt, as it is."

"Well, I've a tidy stake on, myself. I backed the lot, like yourself, in their babyhood, and have been putting a little more on Coriolanus ever since. I shall steady him a bit in the market presently, and perplex Plyant, which will be worth a hundred. He'll think I know something—that the poisoned oats have been discovered—that the treacherous and immoral stable boy has been moved to penitence and confession; all sorts of dramatic elucidation will present themselves to his mind."

"No doubt," returned Luxmoore, laugh-

ing. "I'm off. I promised to look in at Grosvenor Gardens on my way back, and came to ask if you'd come, too; they were complaining yesterday they hadn't seen you for a good week."

"Who's they?" inquired Jim, carelessly.

"Why, the girls, of course. In this case I think it was Annie chiefly who marvelled at your absence."

"Sorry I can't come, but I must attend to business," rejoined the Honble. rising, and, with a slight nod, he disappeared into the subscription-room.

It was just before the break-up, and some heavy Derby betting was going on in the centre of the room. A great deal of money was going on Ptolemy, reported to have thriven amazingly since the Two Thousand, while hostile cries ever and anon broke forth against Coriolanus; offers to lay six hundred to one being vociferated from more than one quarter.

Suddenly, in its usual soft, clear, languid

tones, Laceby's voice is heard in a lull. "I don't want to be bothered with hundreds, Redcar, but if you like to lay six thousand to one, you can put it down."

"Can't lay, sir," rejoined the book-maker; "five, if you like, to that amount."

"No, thanks; I've got a good bit on. I was only tempted by the price to have a little more."

"Eleven to two in monkeys, Mr. Laceby. Shall I put it down?"

"Not enough," rejoined the Honble. as he turned quietly on his heel.

"Eleven to two in monkeys, and I'll throw you the whole Blithedown lot in," cried Redcar. "Is it a bet?"

"Yes, book it," replied Jim, wheeling half round, and giving a slight nod; and then the Honble. sauntered leisurely out of the room, muttering to himself, "I ought to have stood out for six."

Mr. Plyant was more comforted than surprised by Laceby's wager. He knew

that Coriolanus was quite well, and began to think the horse's opponents might eventually regret their determined opposition to him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DERBY TRIAL.

THE business of pleasure is a thing upon which a perfect series of effective essays might be written. Many, indeed, have been given to the world upon the toils of the great social treadmill on which London gyrates from the meeting of Parliament to the grouse festival in August ; but few of those unconnected with the pursuit have any idea of the amount of work that the management of a large racing stud entails upon the owner who *bonâ fide* looks after things himself. There are, of course, men who keep race-horses, and leave everything to their trainer, not knowing posi-

tively whether they will have horses at a meeting or no, and even then in blissful ignorance of what stakes they may be entered to run for till they have had a talk with the manager of their string. There are others, who, simply leaving the entire control of their stud to the trainer, back their animals and come to see them run, when that autocrat advises them it is worth their while. But it is to none such I am alluding. I am speaking of the man who is constantly on the training-ground to see his horses at their work, who superintends regularly all trials, and decides for himself, after due conference with his superintendent of the stable, as to where and when they shall run. The owner of a racing stud, who really attends to such matters himself, leads no idle life you may rely upon it.

Harold Luxmoore had been but a short time upon the turf, but he looked after things for himself, aided by the Honble.

with considerable tact and energy ; probably he might have displayed much less of the former had he not been restrained by his more experienced friend, and interfered injudiciously with Mr. Darlington, who, in spite of his accustomed quiet, reticent manner, had a slight dash of testiness in his disposition.

The novelists who compose history tell us that before the Battle of Hastings the Saxons passed the night in wassail and revelry, the Normans in prayer and fasting. Neither in these days is quite what we should prescribe for our soldiers on the eve of a big fight. Albeit, we would back the men with a savage hunger in their entrails against those who had caroused so late, methinks, when it came to grim business in the early dawn ; more especially if that keen-set multitude saw prospect of hearty breakfast, their wine-soaked antagonists once properly disposed of. We are on the eve, not quite of our Hastings,

but of the grand muster of the squadrons that must do battle next week, and settle whether Liddington Grange shall remain the property of its present owner, or fall under the sway of the usuper.

Harold had passed the night in the Honble.'s rooms, that gentleman having derided the idea of going to bed when he was solemnly pledged to be up and dressed by 6 a.m. At his suggestion they had dined quietly at the Reunion, played whist till close upon two, and then strolled home and had some two or three hours' sleep in their respective arm-chairs. Now, fortified with a strong cup of coffee, they were pacing the Victoria Station, awaiting the signal to take their seats for Uptown, the railway point of debarkation for Blithedown. Mr. Darlington himself, driving a neat waggonette, meets them upon their arrival there.

"Glad to see you, gentlemen," said the trainer, with a quiet, confident smile.

"The missus will have a bit of breakfast ready for you by the time we get to the house; and then, Mr. Luxmoore, we can give Coriolanus his spin, and see if he is the horse he was before we sent him to Newmarket."

"He's all right, I suppose?" remarked Harold, as he took his place in the waggonette.

"He looks as fit and well as ever he did," replied Darlington. "I see they take great liberties with him in the London betting; but they will somewhat repent laying those liberal odds when they see him stripped next Wednesday."

"Well; I put another thousand on him last Monday," remarked Laceby, "and I don't quite want to stand it all out; but I looked upon it they were laying longer odds than they had any business to do, and that I was safe to have the best of the market on the day."

"I saw the lot had been backed for a

thousand, and wondered who it was, sir," replied the trainer.

"It's being the lot was an accident," said Laceby. "I was haggling for half a point more about Coriolanus with Redcar, which he refused to lay, but suddenly said, 'Here's eleven to two against all Blithedown,' and I closed, seeing no chance of getting sixes."

But now the carriage swings through the open gate, rattles round the gravel sweep in front of the house, and pulls up sharply at the gabled porch. Cheery Mrs. Darlington, in her smartest cap—all smiles, and black and crimson ribbons—is there to welcome them.

"Glad to see you, squire! How do you do, Mr. Laceby?" she exclaimed, as the two men shook hands with her heartily. "I'm decked in the colours yet, you see. I've worn them ever since the Two Thousand, and hope to wear them up to the end of the season."

"What! it must be a treble event, eh?" said Harold, laughing.

"Yes, sir. We've waited a long time, and I began to think John was never going to bring off one of the big races again; but luck's turned, and Blithedown means taking Guineas, Derby, and Leger, this year."

"Something like a prophetess this, Harold!" cried the Honble., laughing. "Gad! I wasn't half plucky enough on Monday."

"Wait till you see him," retorted their hostess; "he's a picture, and we've got him ever so much quieter than he was last year. He's not half so fractious and nervous as when he jumped round in the Middle Park. But come in, gentlemen, I'm sure you must be famished, and breakfast is all ready for you."

Lucky are those who, after a couple of hours or so of early travelling on a bright May morning, find themselves ushered

into so pretty and well-furnished a parlour as that of Blithedown. The jasmine and clematis peeped in at the open casement, and delicately perfumed the whole room. Vases of roses and geraniums were scattered about, and the snowy cloth which decked the table was covered with hot cakes, new-laid eggs, such rashers of bacon, butter, and cream as one only sees in the country, and only there when one's hostess looks after her own dairy and poultry.

A few sporting prints are upon the walls. Two or three silver tankards, mementoes from his employers, of big races successfully landed, and a mighty round of cold beef, are on the sideboard. A smaller cup or two, and some three or four medals grouped together, so as to form a sort of trophy, are records of triumphs at various flower shows, and it is a question whether the reticent Mr. Darlington would not be more gratified with taking first prize for the best double bloom at the Crystal

Palace than with having the Blue Ribbon of the sward credited to Blithedown. As his wife pithily phrased it, "It's flowers against turf with Tom, and flowers has it." She was fond of flowers in her way, and, like the true honest women she was, liked to see her husband succeed in whatever might be his undertaking; but her heart was in the farm and the horses, and when the news came to her that Coriolanus had won the Guineas, I think, perhaps, she gloried in it more than her lord.

"Capital bacon, Mrs. Darlington, and—thank you—yes, I will take another cup of tea," said Harold. "Awful cormorants, are we not? eating you out of house and home."

"Ah!" replied the lady, with a comic twinkle of her eyes; "I think I could manage with a good many of you, squire, to breakfast, without being nervous. I tell you what it is, Mr. Laceby, if you can stay the stomachs of a dozen or more stable

boys, after their morning's work, you're fit to cater for the multitude. If it wasn't they sometimes get anxious about their weight, I believe some of those boys would never stop eating; and I like to see 'em, though occasionally I whisper to some of the young ones, 'However do you expect to scale six stone if you go on like this?'"

"Downright heartless, that's what I call it," observed the Honble., helping himself to another slice of cold beef. "Mrs. Darlington, you know hunters grow scarcer, and consequently dearer, every year; that every stone over eleven means fifty pounds a piece extra in the price. I believe that last remark was meant as a caution to me, but it's no use, I'm too hungry to listen to reason."

"It was, and it wasn't," responded the hostess, laughing. "We've one here to sell you when the squire's had a race or two more out of him."

"Which?" asked Laceby, stirring his tea.

"Hypocrite!" responded Mrs. Darlington, her eyes dancing with fun, for she was quite aware of the Honble.'s dislike to that speedy impostor.

"Might do as a cover hack, if it wasn't too far, and I should like to be late on him just once," replied Jim viciously.

"He'll take some beating this year over his own distance, Mr. Laceby," rejoined the hostess, meditatively. "He can cut the whole string down over six furlongs."

"If he's not caught," remarked the Honble.

"And he won't be, at fair weights, by anything in England; but here comes Tom, which means, gentlemen, he's ready when you are."

A glorious May morning, and the broad expanse of gently undulating Down glitters like an emerald sea in the bright spring sunshine, as Luxmoore and the Honble. take their places in the waggonette.

"I thought we might as well drive, sir,"

said Darlington, "as I had the saddles and a few other odds and ends to take down ; the horses, of course, are already there."

"Two Thousand trial over again, I suppose, Darlington. We shall ask Coriolanus to beat Shooting Star at twelve pounds, eh?"

"Just so, sir ; only we'll gallop them over a mile and a half, good measure, instead of a mile."

A few minutes, and they were on the training ground, and Mr. Darlington pulled up at the foot of a slight hillock, beneath which five horses were pacing up and down in Indian file, under the charge of Gibson, the head lad, who was mounted upon a smart-looking hack.

"Holloa ! where the deuce is Burton ?" suddenly exclaimed Harold.

"I am afraid he won't be down till a little later," rejoined Darlington quietly, as he busied himself about removing the saddles from the waggonette.

"Well; but who on earth's to ride Shooting Star?"

"We'll put Doyle upon him, sir; he rides with his head as well as his hands, that lad, and is quite good enough, believe me, to make the most of old Shooting Star."

"Not quite the same thing, though, as Sam on him," remarked the Honble. drily.

"I've allowed three pounds for the difference, Mr. Laceby. Shooting Star will be only giving away nine pounds this morning."

"Can't think how it was you didn't manage to have Burton here," remarked Luxmoore, a little tartly. "I hate not being sure that it is all out of the trial horse."

"You will have no fault to find with Doyle, sir. He knows the horse thoroughly and is a very promising and strong horseman."

A signal from the trainer, and Gibson

directs the lads to slip off their horses and remove the sheets, and then comes the operation of saddling—a work of some little time, as the trainer superintends the placing of every saddle himself—especially the three which he had brought with him in the waggonette, and which are placed respectively on Shooting Star, Coriolanus, and Beggarman.

“Now, Gibson,” he said, “take them down into the dip and start them, and mind you send ’em off well together; and you, boys, remember this—you’re not riding a race, but a trial. You’ll get no credit from me for winning—riding with judgment is what I want. You, especially, Doyle, remember not to come too soon. You’ve all got your orders, mind you follow them.”

Leaving a helper in charge of the waggonette, which, placed with its back to the course, was also to serve as a winning-post, the trio ascended the hillock some

few paces, and awaited the event. Gibson had not much trouble with his charges ; a few minutes after he had mustered them in the dip he had despatched them on their journey to what Harold, Laceby, and Darlington all agreed was a capital start. Hypocrite, always quick on his legs, had, perhaps, a little the best of it, and led the quintette a cracking pace for about half the distance, when his bolt was shot, and he fell back beaten, the running being immediately taken up by Lady Disdain, who, in her turn, collapsed about the mile-post, leaving Beggarman with the lead. From that out, the black came right away with unflinching resolution, and, stalling off a determined challenge from the Two Thousand winner, and a dangerous rush from Shooting Star at the finish, went past the waggonette at a clever length to the good, Coriolanus beating the trial horse by a long neck.

“ By Jove ! the black-un’s won ! ” ex-

claimed the Honble. in tones of unmitigated astonishment.

Mr. Darlington had very great command of countenance, but for once in his life it was evident that he was taken completely aback.

"How are we to translate that?" asked Harold. "I suppose Coriolanus has trained a little off, and that old Shooting Star is either not quite up to the mark, or else Doyle can't get quite as much out of him as Sam Burton."

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Darlington, "but I hope you'll give me a little time to think this out. I'm quite as surprised as you can be just now. What did you think, Mr. Laceby? It struck me that Doyle came just at the right moment, and with considerable judgment."

"If I had money on it," replied the Honble., "I should have counted it fairly lost, and made no complaint about the way Shooting Star was ridden."

"Let us come down and look at them, gentlemen. See for yourselves if they don't look fit and well all round."

Naturally the lion of the morning was the half-bred black. They stopped and regarded him for some minutes without speaking. At last Jim Laceby said, "He's a rum-looking one to be a clinker, and yet if this isn't all wrong he must be. He's a wiry sort, with rare galloping thighs and a good lean varmint head, but he's a trifle ewe-necked, and, though he's a biggish colt, there's a want of substance about him."

"More in appearance than reality, I think," said the trainer.

"Now it's no use running away with the idea that we've got a clipper in that three-cornered brute," said Luxmoore, testily.

"It is much more probable that Coriolanus is a bit off, and that Doyle couldn't quite get the old horse out. I should think the best way would be to try over again

on Saturday with Sam Burton upon Shooting Star."

Darlington, without noticing his employer's remark, proceeded to scrutinize Coriolanus narrowly. He examined his eye, put his hand on his chest, felt his ears, noted his heaving flanks closely, and then gave a quiet, negative shake of the head, ambiguous as Lord Burleigh's nod. He said nothing, and with what it was he dissented was left for his companions to conjecture.

The horses were now carefully sheeted up again, and, leaving Gibson to conduct the team leisurely home, Mr. Darlington once more resumed the box of the wagonette.

"It's an unfathomable go, this," observed the Honble., as he took his place, "and what to make of it, Harold, I'll be hung if I know."

"I'm afraid, Jim, you're shutting your eyes to the writing on the wall," replied

Harold, with a somewhat sad smile.
“The black and crimson are not likely to be as formidable at Epsom as we fondly dreamed. Our crack, depend upon it, is not as good as he was last month. What should you do? Try again on Saturday?”

“I should leave it to Darlington, and I’ll bet he says emphatically No to that.”

“Might as well know the worst at once, don’t you think?” rejoined Harold.

“We’ve done our best to know this morning. All we’ve got to do is to cipher out what is the correct meaning of what we’ve seen. You can’t expect your horses to run the Derby three times within the week successfully. Besides, you mustn’t encroach on old Lumley’s tactics, who’s so fond of trying that they say that it’s positive rest to his team to be sent racing anywhere.”

“Yes, I suppose you’re right, Jim, and I’d better leave it all now to Darlington and Providence. I’ve no doubt you think me

an ass rather," continued the young man in a low, resolute voice, "to have determined to make but one throw for such an inheritance as Liddington; but, by Jove! the first blessed thought I had on seeing Coriolanus beaten just now was that it would be all finished next week."

By this time the waggonette has reached the house, and the two, jumping out, pass through the porch and enter the hall. Luxmoore is about to enter the dining-room on the right, when Darlington suddenly stops him, saying, "I beg your pardon, sir, but I must ask you to step in here;" and as he spoke the trainer opened the door of a comfortably furnished sitting-room on the left.

"I only trust Mrs. Darlington, in the boundlessness of her hospitality, does not think we can possibly require luncheon before we return," said Lacey.

"I don't think the wife could stand your going away without, at all events, looking

at a tray," said Mr. Darlington, with a faint smile; "but the reason I don't want you to go in, Mr. Luxmoore, is that Sam Burton's getting something to eat there."

The Honble. Jim said nothing, but putting his glass to his eye, contemplated the trainer as one might a wizard at the commencement of his incantations.

"But, confound it, Darlington, if he was here, why on earth didn't you make him ride Shooting Star?" inquired Luxmoore.

"He got here just too late, sir, and has no idea that the trial is over. I meant him to do so."

"Why?" ejaculated Harold.

"Because I find he can't keep the result to himself. It was he, Mr. Luxmoore, who betrayed the upshot of the gallop before the Two Thousand. Can I prove it? Well, not perhaps legally, but morally. First evidence," continued the trainer, "is Dr. Slocombe, who can testify that one Berkley Holt, a part owner, by the way, of

The Felon, is continually dining and supping with Sam Burton at Challis's. You don't know it, sir, but that's the Newmarket London hotel. Secondly, Mr. Plyant, the bookmaker, who assures me that the lion's share of the Two Thousand winnings went into the pockets of Mr. Holt and his friends."

Harold says nothing; suddenly flashes through his brain poor Theodora Riche-ton's last warning, and he feels that she had doubtless good warrant for what she said. Darlington is about to expound the whole plot; this is why Coriolanus has failed to do what was expected of him this morning. He has been tampered with, drugged probably to some extent. He awaits Mr. Darlington's further remarks, but as that gentleman is apparently equally waiting upon him to take up the word, he at last vaguely ejaculates "Well?"

"Well, sir," continued the trainer, "when a jockey will sell the result of a trial, for it

is hardly to be supposed he'd part with the information for nothing, one can't be much surprised at his selling a race.

"What the deuce do you mean?" asked Harold.

"I mean this, sir," rejoined the trainer, in a low voice. "You know the opposition that has so steadily set in of late against Coriolanus. Plyant has managed to worm out that the originators of that movement are the bookmaking lot connected with The Felon and Joe Milton's stable—a proper set of thieves. Well, sir, of course, it is their game to get rid of the most dangerous opponent they have for the Epsom race. They consider they've done so; they couldn't get at the horse, but they have at the jockey. They've bought Sam Burton, take my word for it."

The Honble. dropped his eyeglass quietly, and then said laconically, "Very concisely put, Darlington, and I've no doubt that's about where we are."

"I don't quite see what you've got the beggar down here for, though," Harold said, meditatively; "more particularly with such excellent reasons for his knowing nothing about this morning's work. Of course, I shall tell him to send in his jacket; but I could have done that by post."

"Excuse me, sir, but that is by no means what I want, and I do earnestly hope you will be guided by me in this matter. To win the Derby, as an ordinary rule, is hopeless without a good jockey up. A stable boy has won, but he never did a bit of good in the profession afterwards, nor, I'm afraid anywhere else from the last I heard of him. If you throw up Burton, it is too late to engage any one else of any note."

"Just so," observed the Honble.

"But what, then, am I to do?" inquired Luxmoore.

"Be guided by the advice that a wary old turfite once gave an owner under

similar circumstances—"You mun carpet him, sir," rejoined Darlington, demurely.

"I must what?" cried Harold.

But the roar of laughter into which the Honble. burst upset even the austere features of the trainer, and for a few seconds there was no response. At last Jim Laceby collected himself, and replied, "He's right. 'You mun carpet him.' Darlington will explain his meaning."

CHAPTER X.

THE CARPETING OF SAM BURTON.

It is a good many years ago now that a noble owner of race-horses was as completely puzzled as Harold Luxmoore, upon being informed that one of his *employés* was meditating the betrayal of his interests. On referring to the shrewd North-countryman who brought him the intelligence, as to what he had better do, he had received the identical advice that Darlington now tendered, "You mun carpet him, my lord." The Honble. now hastens to explain what this somewhat mysterious phrase means, namely—that he must have Sam Burton before him, give him to understand that

there are rumours that Coriolanus will meet with foul play in the Derby, and then state clearly what he intends to do should Coriolanus prove unsuccessful. About this latter, Mr. Darlington propounds a special threat, which we shall hear of later."

"And now, what do you make of the trial?" inquired Jim, drily. "Do you think Coriolanus has gone off?"

"It can hardly be the case," rejoined the trainer, "the colt looks fresh, bright, and well; remember, gentlemen, that horses can't be expected to go as accurately as clocks; like ourselves, they have their days."

"And, I suppose, unfortunately, he's had his," remarked Harold, grimly.

"And, I dare say, will again," observed Mr. Darlington.

"But not next week, I'm afraid. But there's one thing you seem to have overlooked, that Sam Burton will probably pick up some account of this morning's

gallop ; indeed, I should think he is sure to do. He's safe to lounge through the stables, and talk to the boys."

Mr. Darlington looked at his employer in a somewhat compassionate manner, as he replied, "Perhaps so ; but I don't think he will learn much more than that the nags are well. No, Mrs. Darlington is in charge of him now, and either she, Gibson, or myself will be in charge of him till the train leaves Uptown Station. And now, Mr. Luxmoore, I'll just send Burton in to you," and with a somewhat expressive glance to Laceby, the trainer left the room.

The Honble. thoroughly understood what Darlington meant, and, as the door closed, remarked, "No nonsense about it, Harold, mind ; very quiet, but very firm, and an affect of disbelief in what has come to your ears."

"All right, old fellow, I think I understand the *rôle* ; here he comes."

The door opened and the jockey stood before them.

Sam Burton had been for the last three minutes in a perfect fever of curiosity, mixed with apprehension. He had ate, drank, and talked pleasantly enough with Mrs. Darlington, seen the waggonette drive up, and the trainer, Luxmoore, and Laceby descend. He had wondered where the two gentlemen had come from, and, indeed, asked his hostess, who returned him somewhat vague answers. That he was there to ride Shooting Star, in the Blithedown Derby trial, was to him clear as noonday. He didn't feel very much interested in the result, having no doubt in his own mind that it would be a mere repetition of the gallop before the Two Thousand ; but when Darlington suddenly opened the door, and, after a brief good morning, informed him that Mr. Luxmoore wanted to see him in the next room, instead of asking whether he wanted to

get into his boots or some such question, Sam became extremely puzzled as to what was to be the upshot of affairs.

“Good morning, Burton,” said Harold, in reply to the jockey’s salutation. “I’ve sent for you because I think it only just to tell you that there are numberless rumours afloat as to the reason of Coriolanus going so badly in the betting. All those connected with his health, of course, I know to be false. The horse is as well as ever he was. But those that allude to foul play concerning him can only be proved, or disproved, after the event. Amongst other stories, I have been told that you have been bribed not to win. Stop, don’t interrupt me. I’ve been told that you are hand in glove with the party that own The Felon. I take no heed of such stories. You’re first jockey of the stable, and of course ride the best we have at Epsom ; but, mark me, if Coriolanus runs palpably below his form on Wednesday, I

on him exactly, but I know a real big stake ; quite double what I should land on Coriolanus."

"Darlington has apparently not yet made up his mind altogether about it, but if he comes to the conclusion that the black is the best, I own I shall not feel sanguine," rejoined Harold. "As I said before, Coriolanus is evidently a bit off, which makes Beggarman appear better than he really is—don't you think so?"

"I fancy Darlington don't mean to tell us what he thinks to-day. He is chary of speech always, and, I suspect, was not a little surprised at what we saw this morning. You see he never took to the black ; he's rather a queer-shaped one, and trainers, like society, somewhat look down upon anything with a flaw in its pedigree. But come ; it's time to be starting. Let's say good-bye to Mrs. Darlington, and be off."

Mrs. Darlington insisted upon their

having a glass of some special cherry-bounce of her own preparing before they entered the waggonette, and then, with good wishes for the success of Blithedown in the coming week, she bade them good speed.

Mr. Burton, who occupies the box-seat, is most seriously perplexed by the aspect of affairs. His habitual confident manner is considerably dashed in consequence of Harold's pithy but practical speech. Mr. Darlington's terseness by no means restores his usual self-confidence. To his off-hand inquiry as to how Coriolanus is going on, the trainer replies, "nicely." Still, turning things over in his own mind, Sam Burton comes to the conclusion that a trial of some kind has taken place, and in pursuance of that idea, remarks affably, "Suppose you've had a bit of a gallop with 'em this morning?" Not a muscle of the trainer's face moves, as he rejoins blandly, "Yes, we do most mornings."

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Mr. Burton pursues his inquiries no further. He knows the trainer much too well for that. He feels pretty sure that he is right in his surmise, but he feels perfectly sure that Mr. Darlington intends him to know nothing about what has taken place. Upon the whole, Mr. Burton cannot feel very much surprised at this, it being quite evident that his betrayal of the Two Thousand Trial is known to the trainer, and that Luxmoore, at all events, is cognisant that he has been, to say the least of it, tampered with concerning the Derby. The jockey begins to reflect somewhat ruefully on his bargain; there was more to be made by fair riding than foul; if it was easier a good deal to make certain of losing than winning, yet also there were awkward consequences connected with the one, which were impossible to follow from the other. Luxmoore's idea of trying his horse in public Mr. Burton held to be unconstitutional, and pestilential to the last

degree. It was a thing without precedent ; and then Mr. Burton had visions of a Doncaster meeting, at which some such trial was unintentionally run by a defeated Leger favourite being started for a race on the Friday, and his winning of which led to manifestations by no means in favour of the famous trainer in whose charge he was. Not exactly the man to face the displeasure of the multitude, Sam Burton, but still aware that delinquents of such kind generally escape with a chorus of sibilation and groaning, and run no great risk of personal ill-treatment.

By this time they have arrived at Uptown. Mr. Darlington lifts his hat as the train glides out of the station, and remarks to his employer, "You will hear from me to-morrow afternoon, sir. I shall write after seeing them canter in the morning. I don't think Burton has learnt more than I meant he should."

"And that was—" said Harold, eagerly.

“That you meant standing no nonsense at Epsom. He’ll ride to win now ; but I should let him know nothing. Good-bye, Mr. Laceby ; good-bye, sir.”

“Good-bye, Darlington,” replied the Honble. “We shall meet next week, and see whether this morning’s gallop was right.”

When two hours in an arm-chair has constituted your night’s rest, the line should be rough indeed upon which, duly installed in a first-class carriage, you fail to sleep, and yet our two passengers compassed but fitful slumbers between Uptown and Waterloo. Harold, indeed, spite of all he might say about the relief it was that he had determined, after next week, to break the bondage to which his uncle’s will had consigned him, is haunted by the restlessness wont to attend a man who is gambling for a high stake. He has not attained the phlegm, the practised stoicism of the habitual gambler by any means, but

experiences all the fevered unquiet of the neophyte. He is throwing, remember, for a bigger stake than the most reckless "plunger" on record ever had upon one cast of the dice. To have such an inheritance as Liddington depending upon one race is standing to lose more than the most dashing bettors in turf history have ever faced. It represents, recollect, staking some two hundred and fifty thousand pounds upon a gallop of some two minutes and three-quarters, or thereabouts. Even on the famous snowstorm Derby of ten years ago, over which men gambled so fiercely, and when the thousand to fifteen outsider won, asked with bated breath what it might be, I doubt if there was anything like such sum risked by any one individual; and yet the catalogue of the heavily mulcted was wondrous lengthy on that occasion. Harold's slumbers, indeed, are a phantasm of trials, in which Coriolanus is continually worsted by all sorts of

horses, but with always the same result, that Grace Layton is the prize of the winner. It is in vain he shakes himself, tells himself angrily that his marriage is in no way dependent on his success at Epsom, and again essays to sleep. Still this ghostly Coriolanus is perpetually attempting to give weight to horses of all sorts of colours, until upon seeing him finally ignominiously disposed of by a piebald, Luxmoore awakes with an angry ejaculation.

The Honble. is gazing dreamily out of the window. He has made no attempt to sleep. He is thinking no whit about Blithedown, the horses, or Wednesday next. He is absorbed in once more thinking what the deuce he had better do about this very serious scrape he has unknowingly fallen into. The Honble. Jim really regards himself as a man smitten with a severe epidemic; that he should ever fall in love again is a thing he has looked upon as

utterly impossible. That a marriage should ever come of it, now it has happened, never presents itself to his mind. Now he has awoke to a sense of his own folly, of course, there is only one thing to be done—treat it like the distemper, and stamp it out. To do Jim Laceby justice, he has been so long accustomed to regard himself as a man to whom flirtation and marriage were abstract positions, that it never for a moment occurs to him he may have awakened any feeling on the part of the lady. He would argue, “Bless you, women never flirt with me; they look upon me as safe. If I began making running on my own account, I should expect to be interrupted, and told what Jack So-and-So had said to her in the conservatory the night before.”

“By Jove! Jim,” exclaimed Harold, breaking abruptly in upon his companion’s reverie, “I can’t sleep for dreaming of this confounded trial. I give it up. Better to

think of one trial, even if not satisfactory, than to see a lot of spectral failures on Coriolanus's part."

"It was rather a surprise," remarked the Honble. drily. "What with that, and Darlington's revelations concerning our friend in the next carriage, it has been rather a startling morning."

"Do you think Darlington is right, and that Sam Burton has been frightened out of any proposed iniquities he might contemplate?"

"Yes; upon the whole I do. It's bold play, and I always like that. To tell your jockey you know he means to sell you, that he shall ride all the same, but that you will show him up if he plays you false in such fashion as will effectually finish his professional career, is a clever and daring stroke. I fancy few men would face such certain exposure and consequent effacement of themselves. No," continued Jim, meditatively, "whatever he *did* mean, he'll ride to win now."

"And the next question is, what is he to ride? If we go by this morning's proceedings, of course it ought to be that ugly black brute, and if he does, I know we shan't win, as I'm convinced that gallop was all wrong."

"Now, look here, Harold," replied the Honble. earnestly; "just bear in mind you've nothing more to do with it; that's a question for Darlington to decide; but, of course, with all the tremendous stake you have about winning on Wednesday, you will naturally put Sam Burton on the best."

"Yes, whatever I think myself, I must do that, I suppose. You'll all pronounce me mad if I put my judgment against my trainer's."

"Jove! you know," said the Honble., aghast at the idea, "I should hold old Layton had a right to forbid the banns once more, on the question of your sanity, if you go against Darlington's opinion."

"I don't say I shall ; but this is a thing concerns me and Gracie more than any one," rejoined Harold, doggedly.

"Don't mean to say you're going to take Gracie's opinion against your trainer's?" rejoined the Honble., adjusting his eyeglass, and gazing with undisguised amazement at his friend.

"No ; but her opinion will coincide with mine," rejoined Harold, doggedly.

"Of course ; but that don't make yours any stronger, you know."

"Playing for my inheritance, I claim the right to make trumps."

"Ah, well," said the Honble, "I don't understand *euchre* myself ; but when I've money on *ecarté* I always take advice from an experienced backer, if I have one. I don't want to be rude, Harold ; but I do think Darlington likely to be a better judge than you as to which is the best of your string."

"I've a sort of inspiration, Jim."

"Now, for God's sake, don't make an utter exhibition of yourself! Inspirations, dreams, and hundred-to-one chances are simply, on the turf, pit-falls of unutterable destruction. Just do what Darlington tells you."

"I don't say I wont, but I'm not quite clear I shall."

"All right: perhaps you'll let Herrick, myself, and the rest of us have notice, so that we may save ourselves," retorted the Honble. drily. "Tell me, please, what Darlington says to-morrow; and let me know on Monday what you mean doing before I go to Tattersall's."

"Certainly, you shall hear what Darlington's opinion is to-morrow—that is Friday evening; and if you'll lunch in Grosvenor Gardens on Monday, we'll go on to Tattersall's together."

"I'll meet you at Tattersall's," rejoined the Honble. shortly.

"Why can't you lunch in Grosvenor

Gardens? Annie was complaining only the other morning they hadn't seen you for days."

"No; I'm going to give up that house for a bit."

"You give up the Laytons?" cried Harold, with an angry flush. "You might remember what that means to me. If you give up them, you and I must stand on a different footing. I don't want to quarrel, Jim, but you know it must be so."

"Yes, I'm afraid so," rejoined the Honble., ruefully. "We won't quarrel, Harold. You're a good young beggar, and I like you, and let me only see you victorious at Epsom, and I can go abroad with a clear conscience."

"Go abroad!" exclaimed Luxmoore. "What do you mean? What's the matter? You, of all men, can't be in grief of any kind, I should fancy; but if you are, Jim, I claim the privilege of being what help I can."

"You're a deuced good fellow," replied Laceby, as he fidgeted somewhat in his seat, "but I've come to no harm. Nothing serious; only it's a niceish year for going abroad, you know, and I've been meaning to go ever so long."

"I don't see it's better than any other year; but still, what's all this got to do with your giving up Grosvenor Gardens?"

"Well, I don't want you to be under any wrong impression," replied the Honble., screwing his glass very hard into his eye. "The fact is, you see, I'm not quite so old as I thought I was, or else, perhaps, you've got the complaint so devilish bad you're infectious. By gad! that's it—never thought of that before—confound it; I caught it from you."

"What do you mean?" cried Harold, with a roguish gleam of glad intelligence in his eyes.

"Well, I suppose it was looking at you, you know. Seeing what an awful state

you'd got into first weakened my constitution; but I discovered the other day I was getting shocking spoony on Annie Layton."

"Well, what of that?"

"Good God! He says 'what of that?' as if it was of no consequence! Well, I've never suffered since I was nineteen, and I got in row enough then for one man's life. Everybody says change of scene is the cure when just you're hard hit; so I'm off. I should go round the world, only one would be back again so awfully soon. Central Africa's the only place left where there seems to be any uncertainty about the arrival of the trains."

"But look here, Jim, if you love Annie, why not ask her to marry you before you start on your travels?" retorted Harold, who, thanks to a hint or two dropped by his *fiancée*, was by no means disposed to take an unfavourable estimate of the Honble's. chance.

“What, marry!—I? My dear fellow, I never heard of such a thing! Some of us are meant to live single, or else the world might get over-peopled—that is to say, this country. I’m cut out for a bachelor; always late for breakfast, and never heard family prayers since my childhood; then I’ve no particular time for going to bed, and dine any hour you like between six and half-past nine. Matrimony, Harold, means regularity, and Jim Laceby, sad to say, don’t.”

“Never mind, lunch in Grosvenor Gardens on Monday, if it is only to say good-bye. You may just as well. You can’t, in decency, repudiate saying good-bye.”

“Well, no; and it may be as well that day as another. It’s a case of visiting with the fox who has lost his tail, though. Yes, if I’d been younger it would have been all very well, but I’m too old to submit to the operation now. She is a

real nice girl, and it is my misfortune I didn't meet her ten years ago."

"But you did," cried Harold, with a roar of laughter.

"Jove! that's true; but I couldn't ask her to marry me at twelve years old, and how was I to guess I should fall in love with her at twenty-two. What a rum thing time is, eh, Harold? To think that the omission of a *cadeau* of lemon-drops might result in an indignant refusal half a score years later."

"Here we are at Waterloo once more, thank Heaven!" cried Harold, as the train swept into the station. "I'm off home, Jim, to have a good couple of hours' sleep before dressing, and shall consign Coriolanus and the Derby to utter oblivion, I hope."

"Every man his own hansom, then," replied the Honble. "For the present, good-bye."

“Good-bye. Remember Grosvenor Gardens at two on Monday.”

“All right,” replied Jim, as his cab drove off.

CHAPTER XI.

COMPARING DAY.

THE afternoon's post brought Harold Mr. Darlington's fiat on the yesterday morning's proceedings. It was laconic, as the trainer's communications invariably were, whether by letter or word of mouth :—

“SIR,

“I have seen the horses do their work this morning, and watched them very closely. I consider that Coriolanus is the same horse he was when he won the Two Thousand, and that Shooting Star is also in excellent trim. I have no doubt that the black has most unexpectedly trained on,

and is improving daily. I fancy yesterday's gallop was quite correct, and that we should rely upon Beggarman for Wednesday, unless you have strong pecuniary reasons for winning with the other.

“Respectfully yours,
“JOHN DARLINGTON.”

“He's not effusive,” said Harold, laughing, as he handed the note across to Laceby, with whom he was dining at the Reunion.

“Can't see you want any more,” rejoined the Honble., after he had read it. “He tells you Beggarman's your best ; but, of course, if Coriolanus is Coriolanus, you must have a good chance of winning with him also. By heavens ! what luck to have a Two Thousand winner in the stable and a better one behind.”

“What on earth am I to do ?” replied Luxmoore. “I've told all my friends to stand Coriolanus.”

“It can’t be helped: the winning of the Derby means so much to you that you must go for your best.”

“I know I should, Jim, always supposing this black brute is the best, which I’m still not clear about.”

“I’d rather take Darlington’s opinion than yours upon that point,” rejoined the Honble., sententiously.

“Of course; and yet I cannot help clinging to my old faith in Coriolanus.”

“Don’t be absurd, Harold; you must put your own opinion on one side. How do you stand on the black?”

“I should win a fair stake on him. I backed my lot a long while ago, you know, at long shots; but, of course, I win a good deal more on the Two Thousand horse. But the thing is, what I’m to do about my friends, Herrick and Company.”

The Honble. hesitated a little, and then said, “Send a commissioner for Plyant at once; tell him to back Beggarman, and

put Herrick and Company on at the best price he manages to pick up between this and Monday. It can't be very bad, considering what they lay against him now, though he will come with a rattle when Plyant commences operations."

When Mr. Plyant arrived at the Reunion between nine and ten on the Friday evening, and received his commission, he looked a little serious.

"It's a rum un, it is, Mr. Luxmoore, to pull off the Guineas and find you've a better at home to take to Epsom. A thing one don't expect to see above once in a lifetime: though it was the case at Danebury in '54; so this makes twice. Of course, I'll attend to orders and do my best, but it strikes me it's the Two Thousand 'com.' over again, and there's somebody doing it just in front of me!"

"What do you mean, Plyant?" inquired the Honble.

"Well, it's just the same lot who backed

Coriolanus for the Newmarket race, who so persistently lay against him for Epsom. If you could win with him, Mr. Luxmoore, I think, as the Americans say, we'd give 'em such fits as would prevent their being about for some time."

"But they don't back Beggarman; so what is the difficulty?" inquired Luxmoore.

"No, sir, no! But, don't you see, they have made Coriolanus shaky in the betting as it is, and the moment we begin to back the other, the blessed public, always anxious to be on early, and always convinced of its own astuteness, will take to plunging in fivers with all its habitual enthusiasm."

"Oh, come," cried Laceby, laughing, "the public's fivers won't make much difference."

"I beg your pardon, sir; the public's pounds and fivers, when they come pouring in from the Solway Firth—that is, Scotland—to the Land's End—from Cork, Dublin,

and Plinlimmon—wherever that town may be situated—constitute a big sum of money. The people's commission, Mr. Laceby, when the people are sweet, is a big un. Bless 'em!" remarked Mr. Plyant, meditatively. "I've often laid to lose ten thousand against a horse that I knew hadn't galloped for a month. They're impulsive, the public, and—yes, Mr. Laceby," continued the bookmaker, with a slight quiver of his sinister eyelid, "as you remarked—credulous."

"Confound you!" said Jim, laughing, "I said nothing; but I still don't see why the public should jump at this."

"The public is dramatic in its fancies; the public has always a dream of winning a thousand to ten if it can raise the tenner. The public, Mr. Laceby, knows nothing about racing, but, as a rule, is wonderfully well up in the story of Theodore's winning the Leger after a hundred pounds to a walking-stick had been laid against him.

The public is always putting down its walking-stick and taking to crutches in consequence. To win the Two Thousand with one horse, and then the Derby with an outsider, is just the dramatic idea to fetch popular feeling."

"Well, Plyant, you must do the best you can," replied Luxmoore, much amused.

"Very well, sir," said the bookmaker, as he took up his hat. "What the public will back at the lists the last few days before the Derby would astonish you; they've dreams, and tips, and fancies about the fifty to one lot you couldn't imagine. The sporting world, Mr. Luxmoore, will be slow to believe that you've a better than Coriolanus. They may think there's something wrong with him, but they won't be in any hurry to back Beggarman. It's the excitable public I'm afraid of. Good-night, gentlemen; I can only do my best."

"Good-night, Plyant. Remember, what-

ever Coriolanus's enemies know about him, they know nothing about this trial."

"Quite sure, sir?"

"Yes," replied Harold. "We discovered where the stable leaked last time, and we took care it shouldn't happen again."

The bookmaker rubbed his hands softly together. "I didn't quite like to allude to a sore subject, Mr. Luxmoore, but I had misgivings you hadn't got at that. More afraid of that than the public, to tell the truth. Once more, good-night, sir."

"Well, now my mind's easier," said Harold. "Whatever my own intimates have backed Coriolanus for, they may stand in with me on the other; and if I can get another decent jockey, they shall run on their merits next Wednesday."

"My dear Harold!" ejaculated the Honble., as much aghast as the Sailor King's trainer must have been when, waiting on his Majesty to take orders

concerning the Goodwood Cup, he was bluffly told "to start the whole fleet."

"Don't jaw, Jim, but come and smoke, and thank your Maker you never owned a Derby favourite."

Solemn and sad are the conferences held in the bar parlour of the King's Head at Liddington. The doctor and Mr. Calvert shake their heads and sigh over the supineness of the Blithedown trainer—not particularly clear as to what steps they consider it imperative on him to have taken, but with a dimly confused notion that Berkley Holt ought to have figured in the police reports before now, and that Darlington should have reported to the stud-groom that Sam Burton's jacket had been duly called in.

"Here's Coriolanus half a point worse again in the market," observed Mr. Calvert, dropping *Bell's Life*, which he had been steadily perusing for the last half-

hour, upon Dr. Slocombe's entrance on the Sunday evening preceding the great event. "As I told Nancy just now, I don't think she'll have made such a very smart investment when the flag falls, after all."

"It's odd--deuced odd," replied the doctor, dropping into an armchair and lighting a cigar. "Darlington says the horse is all right, doesn't he?"

"Yes. I wrote to ask if there was anything wrong, and here's an answer to get from a man you're supposed to be working with! Writes as if he was telegraphing--

" 'DEAR CALVERT,

" 'Horses all doing well. How are you off for carnations at Liddington? Any really good to spare? Mrs. Darlington's kind regards.

" 'Yours truly,

" 'JOHN DARLINGTON.' "

"Seems to be thinking more of his

flowers than his horses," muttered the doctor.

"Yes; and apparently has taken no manner of notice of the information I gave him. Then, he says we send him no stuff to work upon from the Grange paddocks. It makes one ill to think of a man maundering about carnations with a Two Thousand winner in his charge."

"He's clever too, Calvert," observed the doctor, meditatively. "You couldn't have found a fault with Coriolanus when he went down for the Middle Park Plate. It was no fault of Darlington's he didn't win."

"Of course not; it was that scoundrel Burton, and he's all ready again to sell the Derby, no doubt. What I blame Darlington for is that the villain's not got his deserts long ago. How is it we haven't heard that he's been kicked out, at all events?"

"Never mind, Mr. Calvert," exclaimed Nancy Hamper, gaily. "What does it

matter where they are in the betting as long as they are first at the winning-post?"

"It's very curious Beggarman being nibbled at," remarked the doctor.

"Not at all," replied the stud-groom; "if people think there is something wrong with Coriolanus, they'll suppose Beggarman to be the best of the Blithedown lot."

"But didn't I hear you say just now that you had got a note from Mr. Darlington, and the horse was all right?" chimed in Mrs. Hamper.

"Yes; but what reliance can you place upon a man who jumbles up Coriolanus and carnations," retorted Mr. Calvert, testily; "and who, when he's put in possession of valuable information, simply chews it like an old cow?"

"I'll hold you a new bonnet to a new hat, Mr. Calvert, that the bells are ringing in Liddington next Wednesday," cried the hostess, blithely.

"Next Christmas, you mean," rejoined the stud-groom.

"Is it a bet, Mr. Calvert?" cried the hostess.

"If you like, Nancy; I may as well win a new hat, if it's only to put a band round."

"For shame, Calvert!" exclaimed the doctor; "time enough to order our mourning when our crack is beat."

"Black and crimson ribbons for me!" rejoined Mrs. Hamper, with a jolly laugh and that sanguine belief of anything in the light of a bet or a lottery coming off in her favour which is so characteristic of her sex generally.

Mr. Calvert shook his head and declined further discussion. The immunity of consequences that Holt and Sam Burton still enjoyed had shaken his confidence in Mr. Darlington, which was further confirmed by seeing Sam Burton positively announced as the rider of *Coriolanus* in the columns of *Bell*.

The Honble. Jim was warmly welcomed in Grosvenor Gardens when, accompanied

by Luxmoore, he arrived there at lunch-time on the Monday. He was scolded by the ladies for his unwonted absence, and reminded that in the season they did not expect to be so forgotten.

“In the winter, Mr. Laceby,” cried Gracie, “we scarcely hope to see you, except in a hard frost, but in the lazy summer sunshine we admit no excuse for such unparalleled neglect. Which of us was it? Who offended you, Annie or I?”

Jim muttered something about “town awfully full—numerous engagements,” in reply to this laughing attack; but he noticed that Miss Layton, though she said nothing, looked rather anxiously for his answer. The announcement of luncheon, however, cut matters short, and the party followed the lady of the house to the dining-room. Mr. Layton was, as usual, away in the City, for he still clung to the till, and had by no means retired from business; while it was seldom Dick Layton honoured the family

mansion at that meal, he indeed occupying chambers of his own, and by no means affecting the paternal roof, except when he had nowhere else to dine. Still, I think that quartette—for really Mrs. Layton, good lady, was scarcely to be reckoned—got on very pleasantly without the males of the establishment.

But when they once more returned to the drawing-room, and had paired off as such a party naturally would do, Miss Layton again opened the subject, and said—

“Why have you never been near us the last ten days, Mr. Laceby? I want the truth, please. Is it that I offended you the other day with my plain-speaking? If so, I ask pardon.”

“Certainly not,” replied the Honble., with a vivid perception that he was in for an awkward conversation.

“I don’t think I said anything rude: rather the reverse.”

“Very much so—gave me credit for all

sorts of qualities I don't possess ; in short, almost hinted I was likely to put forth wings, and blossom into an angel, you know."

"Don't laugh at me, please; but when you know us as school-girls you are all apt to forget that we have grown up, and consider us saucy if we presume to speak save as school-girls."

"Jove! you are right there in one way," rejoined the Honble., abruptly; "we *are* apt to forget that you have grown up. Yes, your family ought to send you about ticketed for a year or so, just to remind us."

"Of what?" cried the girl.

"Oh, nothing much; but we don't comprehend all at once that the girl we bought bonbons and so on for, has suddenly become eligible for orange-flowers and a plain gold ring."

"Mr. Laceby!" retorted Annie, as the colour rushed into her cheeks, "I don't

know what I have done that you should speak to me in this fashion."

"No ; it is my turn to apologize now, if I have vexed you. I did not mean to do that, Annie," replied the Honble., gently.

"Why do you jeer at the child you used to be kind to ?"

"I don't jeer ; I'm only regretting that the child I was fond of has bloomed into the young woman I—I—have a great regard and esteem for," concluded Jim, a little incoherently.

The young lady was silent. With the intuitive knowledge of her sex she began to have an inkling of the truth. Like a very woman, she wished Laceby would speak out ; and yet, at the same time, dreaded that he should do so, having by no means made up her mind on the subject. We most of us appreciate an offer of any sort that gratifies our vanity, self-esteem, or greed for gold, even if circumstances compel us to decline it. How

much more, then, should a woman, at least, value the highest compliment a man whom she esteems can offer her !

“ I don’t know why you should regret I have grown up,” said Annie at last.

“ You rather twist my words,” rejoined the Honble., who by this time had recovered his equilibrium. “ Of course, we like you best when you’re of an age we can pet and so on.”

“ Indeed !” retorted Miss Layton, laughing. “ What dreadful stories these novelists and playwrights do tell, then ! They certainly give us to understand that you appreciate us more a little later.”

“ Just so. They’re generally speaking of young men, you know ; and then, for the most part, they don’t feel what they write about. At all events, at my age, I think we get on with the children best.”

“ You don’t think anything of the sort, Mr. Laceby,” cried the girl, quickly. “ Gracie and I know better, anyway, and could ill afford to lose you.”

"Very good of you to say so, but I'm afraid you must submit to that deprivation temporarily," retorted the Honble., in his most *trainant* tones.

"What do you mean?" inquired Miss Layton.

"I'm going abroad for a bit," rejoined Jim, "after Epsom. Doctors say I ain't the thing, you know. I'm short of ozone or oxygen, or some of the *et ceteras* necessary to our daily comfort."

"But you're not really ill, are you?" inquired Annie Layton.

"Not more than's fashionable; oughtn't to have been attacked till two months later, you know."

"I say, Jim, do you know how late it is?" cried Harold, rising. "I must go to Tattersall's, Gracie dear, before it's too late. I shall say good-bye now. You'll see me no more till our Waterloo is over; although, of course, the telegram will let you know beforehand whether you're to be mistress

of Liddington or a small house in May-fair."

"Good-bye, my Harold," returned the girl, with a merry laugh ; "and, remember, your bride-elect is equal to either fate—to queen it at Liddington, or to be celebrated for her *petits soupers* in a twelve foot square dining-room in Curzon Street."

"Adieu, Mr. Laceby," said Annie. "We shall, I suppose, see you again before your emigration ?"

"Perhaps ; but not if the heathen get the better of us at Epsom. We count them all heathens who don't believe in Blithedown, remember. Farewell !"

* * * * *

Tattersall's this Monday is full, bubbling over. Is there not the comparing of books to take place amongst backers and layers, ere they adjourn to that classic sward which, at all events, Macaulay's mythical New Zealander is never likely to see, any more than to seat himself on London Bridge or

on the banks of the Thames, as Volney predicted long before our own historian? How many hearts have broke, how many lives been spent, how many fortunes won and lost, over the turf of the English Olympiad! Laurel crowns! beshrew me! What care we for laurels in the days of gold we live in? The crown of our Olympic Games is the placing one hundred thousand pounds to your credit at Coutts', Childs', or Herries', that struggle for the Blue Ribbon of the race-course once satisfactorily decided in your favour,—the magnitude of the victory mightily apt in these times to be weighed by the money won upon it.

That the advance of Beggarman in the betting during the last two days should escape the ken of such shrewd observers as Messrs. Holt, Larcher, and Co. would be, of course, impossible, and the fraternity were no little puzzled to account for it; but Holt, after some consideration, ex-

plained it to his confederates precisely in the manner Mr. Plyant had predicted.

"As it happens," he said, "I'm afraid we've thrown money away on making Coriolanus safe. I've not been able to see Burton, but suspect the horse has gone wrong. Of course, they have to depend on Beggarman now, and so back him; but at all events, our horse beat him fair and square in "the Champagne," and it's natural to suppose, knowing how well The Felon has done, that he will do so again."

The attorney, it is true, got a little uneasy about the new Blithedown favourite; but Messrs. Goodman and Osgrove seemed quite of Holt's way of thinking, and, as Berkley saw, were very busy with the pencil that afternoon, although what form their speculations took he did not trouble himself to inquire.

But the comparing is over at last. That wonderful crowd that always swarms around the subscription wicket waxes more fever-

ish and excitable as the sun begins to wane in the heavens, and more fretful than ever to know what they are doing inside. That ominous ring under the clock has begun to form, where so many a favourite has received the *coup de grâce*, and where the public have read later of many of their fancies being nailed down, speaking figuratively, and carted away.

Coriolanus has had rather a bad time during the last week at Bath, in consequence of the indomitable hostility of the Holt party, and those who derived their inspiration from them—the Ring, like the Stock Exchange or a flock of sheep, apt to follow a plucky leader either in flight or onslaught.

Very perplexing is Mr. Plyant this afternoon, and very perplexing has Mr. Plyant been for the last two days, to the astute members of the Victoria Club. He is so willing to back both horses that his *confrères* don't quite know what to make of him.

“ ‘Coms.!’ Bless you, my innocents, meaning my own special innocents—yes! I’ve two pockets full of ’em. Who wants the money? Here’s instructions to take all I can get about Beggarman at twenties to one in the right hand, and a very tidy stake to put on Coriolanus in the other, without limit. Settle it amongst yourselves, gentlemen; I’m anxious to get done.”

Accustomed to Mr. Plyant’s badinage, layers made a violent attack, to begin with, on the winner of the Guineas; but the coolness with which he was backed for a couple of thousands staggered his assailants, and when Mr. Plyant, with a pleasant smile, remarked, “What!—all done at the price? Now, how about the other?” they felt more at sea than ever. Once more, however, did layers harden their hearts, and write down Beggarman on the losing side of the ledger to a considerable extent. But again did the backer tire them out;

that is to say, as long as anybody chose to offer ten to one against Beggarman, Mr. Plyant was willing to accept those odds.

Mr. Redcar, one of the largest and acutest speculators on the turf, and a strong opponent generally of the Blithe-down stable, was himself puzzled, and, after laying heavily against Luxmoore's pair, is fain to comfort himself with the reflection that he cannot win with both of them.

It is not till just before the break-up of the circle that Harold, followed by Laceby, lounges up to the little throng. His appearance is quickly recognized, and Redcar immediately exclaims, "Back your horse for a monkey, Mr. Luxmoore?"

"Certainly. Which do you want to lay against? Price them."

"Ten monkeys against Beggarman," retorted the bookmaker.

"Put it down. Now, what about the other?"

Redcar hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Eight thousand to a thousand—is it a bet?"

"Of course. Very liberal price indeed. You always do lay us a good price. Good evening."

"You can lay it again, just to a monkey, you know," chimed in the Honble., "if you think it worth while."

"Thank you, no, Mr. Laceby. I've done," rejoined the bookmaker.

Outside, the sweltering, greasy, truculent crowd that congregates about the door of the subscription-room was more confused than ever when it became known to it that, while Coriolanus had declined in the betting to eight to one, Beggarman had advanced to tens, and that both had been backed freely.

CHAPTER XII.

EPSOM.

“FORTUNE delights in giving slippers to those who have wooden legs, and gloves to those who have no hands,” quoth Théophile Gautier; and, in the matter of racing, the caprices of the goddess are manifold. Neither money, experience, nor years on the turf enabled the late Earl of Derby or Lord George Bentinck to carry off the great Epsom prize. Thousands have been paid over and over again for horses deemed capable of achieving such victory, and it is difficult to recall an instance in which such plucky outlay has been rewarded. But the most daring

gambler that ever made a bold throw for fortune or beggary on the famous Surrey race-course had never risked so much as Harold Luxmoore was about to do, this bright May day, on the twain that carried the hopes of the black and crimson hoops. Jim Laceby and himself had been down the previous day to see "The Woodcotes" run, and to confer with Mr. Darlington, who reported both colts undeniably well and fit to race; but the trainer adhered to his opinion that the black was unmistakably the best. "That is to say, at this present time," continued Mr. Darlington; "for I'm bound to admit he's a very delicate horse, an uncertain feeder, and all that kind of thing, and that I believe, as a rule, Coriolanus would turn out the better of the pair; but this week Beggarman is in wonderful form."

"He was a good way behind The Felon last year," remarked the Honble. drily.

"Just so, Mr. Laceby; and may be again

for all we can tell. I only know Beggarman is most amazingly improved, and is a rare stout colt. The Felon is very probably the former, and we know for certain he's the latter. He's beaten us twice already from his gameness."

The betting on the Wednesday morning ruled as follows :—

5 to 2	against	The Felon (tf).
5 to 1	„	Ptolemy.
7 to 1	„	Coriolanus (tf).
8 to 1	„	Caraway.
10 to 1	„	Beggarman.

That the public generally were immensely puzzled by the sensational proceedings connected with the Blithedown horses was only natural ; but the prophets, also, hardly knew how to deal with them. The secret of the trial had been marvellously well kept ; and although, as a general rule, "the money," meaning the horse upon which most is staked, indicates the best of the stable, yet in this case it was not so.

Mr. Plyant, the accredited commissioner of Blithedown, the owner, and his friends, seemed perfectly indifferent as to which of the pair they backed, but at the same time appeared to have plenty more to stake upon the black and crimson hoops. One young gentleman of a sanguine disposition, and lately affiliated to the sporting press, invested three or four choice cigars, a couple of hours, and a soda-and-brandy or two in the hopeless endeavour of "drawing" Mr. Darlington. His more experienced brethren smiled; and he owned at breakfast next morning that he had ascertained merely that Coriolanus and Beggarman were very well, and nice horses; further, that he was committed to the giving of a receipt for the destruction of wireworm, the which, as he observed plaintively, "I have as yet to learn."

Trains steam at a few minutes' interval from both Waterloo and Victoria. Thousands plod up the dusty lanes, or swarm

across the Heath to the back of the Stand. Vehicles there are of all descriptions, from lordly drags to four-horse "busses;" from phaetons and pair to flies that look as if they did duty as chicken-houses from May to May; vans, caravans, costermongers' barrows; but, in the days of my story, thanks to Heaven, no bicycles. That there were more people than upon any previous occasion is a matter of course, without any intention of jesting. The newspapers always tell us so, and, as the facility of travelling increases, it is probably the case.

But of all the sunny hours one spends at the great turf carnival, that lounge in the paddock before the race is by far the most enjoyable. We come across friends not seen for years, and have many a quiet gossip about old times in far distant lands; and call to mind how we got beat for the gold cup at Bangalore, or won the Montreal Handicap at St. Hyacinth. We remember good weeks at the Curragh, and

terrible disasters on the neutral ground beneath the grim old rock of Gibraltar; lunches at Ascot and revels at Aldershot; frightfully impecunious times in Babylon and days of flirtation and lotus-eating at Goodwood—"that meeting, don't you recollect, old man? when everything came off"; also that other meeting at Stockbridge, in which the results were so diametrically opposite. Then there are the horses to look at; and what judges we all think ourselves upon this occasion, and how critical we are! "Too light below the knee," "Big as a bullock," "A regular dog-horse," and a hundred such remarks are bandied about; and then one once more comes across an old friend, and, sitting on the grass beneath THE tree, with a cigar in one's mouth, temporarily forgets that the Derby is about to be run.

Berkley Holt is in the paddock, but with no view to gossip or handshaking with old intimates. Early acquaintances of Berkley,

in these days, are by no means keen of renewing their old friendship; for though he still ruffles it bravely—indeed, of late, thanks to the success that has attended him since his connection with Joe Milton's stable, right bravely—yet the world has no very exalted opinion of Mr. Holt. Berkley is there strictly on business; he wants to have a look at these Blithedown horses, to have a word with Sam Burton if he can manage it, and, finally, just to take a farewell glance at The Felon before he wins—for that will be the result of the race is Mr. Holt's firm opinion. His book is closed and is made thoroughly on that belief, with what the initiated would denominate "a good bit to spare" against Coriolanus.

One of the first he meets of those that he wishes to see is Joe Milton.

"Well, Joe," he says cheerily, "how's our horse?"

"Oh, he's right enough," replied that

gentleman, attentively considering his boots. "I ain't got him here, you know, because I don't see any use fidgeting 'em before they're wanted, you see, Mr. Holt."

"Well, perhaps you're right; still, The Felon's good-tempered enough."

"Just so; quite so; but what's the use of aggravating 'em before they gallops? That's what I say, and I'm not going to have my horse made a baby-show of."

Berkley eyed the speaker keenly, and became at once convinced that Mr. Milton had been drinking either his own or The Felon's health more than was quite judicious.

"Very odd the way they back this Blithedown half-bred, isn't it?"

"Now, look here, Mr. Holt," responded Milton, "don't you talk any dashed nonsense; that Beggarman's no more a half-bred than our horse. If they don't know his dam's blood, I do. She never ran, but she's clean bred enough. Not that it

matters or makes any difference ; we beat him before, and of course we can again."

"It is odd they don't know it," rejoined Berkley, "but, as you say, it makes no real difference as far as the race goes."

"Not a bit, sir ; not a bit, sir. See you here, I suppose, after we've done it ?"

"Certainly, Joe. I only hope we shall do it."

"Of course we shall. I tell you, Mr. Holt, they haven't seen such a clipper as ours for many a year ;" and, bestowing a wink of much solemnity on Berkley, the trainer walked off.

Suddenly there is a murmur of "Here's the Blithedown pair!" and Holt pushed his way through the crowd to look at them. The Two Thousand winner comes first, looking bright as a star. His coat shone like satin, and a handsomer specimen of a racehorse it would have been hard to discover than the beautiful dark bay Coriolanus. He laid his ears back ever and

anon, and showed a disposition to lash out when his circle of admirers pressed too close upon him. He was followed by a great solemn-looking black colt, who seemed to regard his surroundings with indolent curiosity—a colt evidently in the very bloom of condition, but by no means a taking one, more especially to an inexperienced eye. Many men would have passed his owner's verdict on him, to wit, that "he was a three-cornered brute;" but if you really were a judge of a racehorse and had patience to look him over, you would probably come to the conclusion that, though a somewhat queer-shaped one, he was a colt with a deal of character. A leaner, more varmint head was seldom seen; spoilt, it was true, by a decided ewe neck. He was a narrowish colt, which as a rule means speedy perhaps, but jady decidedly; still he had muscular thighs, let down low as a greyhound's, and no man, who knew what a horse should be, could

help recognizing the enormous propelling power he must possess. His forelegs were undoubtedly somewhat light, but they were undeniably clean and flat ; while there was that in the bold but placid eye, and broad open nostril, that would induce an old sportsman to back him just for a trifle on the off-chance. Still, the public as a rule, that is, the public who saw him, put but little faith in Beggarman, and waxed sweeter and sweeter over the handsome Coriolanus every minute. Berkley, after deep and earnest survey, comes to the same conclusion as the public, and accounts for the mysteries of the market in this wise :—

“ Found their second string, when they came to try, so very much better than they expected, that I suppose they thought it incumbent to back it. Don't make Beggarman dangerous, but confirms my idea all along that their Two Thousand horse is no clipper.”

The public, circulating in its usual erratic fashion, at last wakes to the fact that the favourite is not in the paddock at all, and indulges in as much temper as any one of the equine celebrities it has come to criticize could achieve. Angry the public, and with some reason, that it should be mulcted of its half-sovereigns to see the overture and find the first violin omitted. On the other hand, why should an owner, with a nervous colt that he has backed for a large stake, run the risk of upsetting the animal's temper immediately before the race? Still, the public argued peevishly, The Felon never was a nervous horse, and he ought to have been saddled in the paddock. Not likely, though, that Mr. Joe Milton or his masters would trouble themselves about the public's opinion or convenience.

"Now, Darlington," said the old stud-groom, as he ranged up alongside of the trainer, "what's the meaning of all this? What's wrong with Coriolanus? Why, he looks a picture!"

"There's nothing wrong, Calvert. We've had a little hitch in the stable, but you gave me the straight tip, and I've arranged all that. I'm glad you think Coriolanus looks well."

"Yes; but, confound it, why isn't he first favourite?"

"Because, my dear Calvert, Beggarman's better. In an hour, I suppose, the race will be run, but if you went into the ring and announced the fact, they'd only laugh at you. You see, the public is going for the bay, and the stable for the black."

"Well, I go with the public," retorted Calvert, doggedly.

"Quite right," rejoined Darlington; "but, from a pecuniary point of view, you'd better go and put a little on Beggarman, because——" And here the trainer whispered something into the stud-groom's ear that made him start.

"Well, you're clever, Darlington, I'll not deny, and both horses do you credit, but

it's clean madness to do what you're about to do. Mr. Luxmoore knows it, I suppose?"

"Certainly, and thoroughly approves. By the way, you never sent me those carnations."

Mr. Calvert turned sharply upon his heel: that a man should commence drivelling about carnations when Coriolanus was stripped for the Derby was to him past all endurance, and the stud-groom walked away in high dudgeon.

"Well, Jim, what do you think of it now?" said Harold, as he and the Honble. left the paddock together.

"I think your pair fit to race for their lives, and that, bar accidents, you'd about win with either, though I'm all for the one that pulled off the trial. Ptolemy looks devilish fit. Wish we'd seen The Felon. I should like to have taken stock of the most dangerous card we've got against us. Can't make out why they didn't show him ;

he was a good-tempered colt enough last year."

"Well, we're going for the black, dead against my own convictions," rejoined Harold. "I still believe Coriolanus will prove the best of the two. Great bit of luck to find Justice disengaged, was it not?"

"Yes; but how can you expect the Two Thousand horse to prove the best with the orders you've given?"

"Hang it, Jim, I've satisfied Darlington. All he stipulated was that Coriolanus should bring them along till they were round Tattenham Corner. I've told Justice he may do as he pleases after that."

"What confounded nonsense!—it'll end probably in Beggarman and Coriolanus cutting each other's throats, and The Felon winning in consequence."

"I can't help it. I have my superstitions," replied Harold.

"Better for you if you'd had a fever and

been confined to your bed," rejoined the Honble., shortly, as they entered the Stand.

"We shall see, Jim," was the reply.

Berkley Holt, meanwhile, had achieved what business he had in the paddock, with the exception of exchanging a word or two with Sam Burton. The wonderfully blooming appearance of Coriolanus made him extremely anxious to see that worthy for a minute or two, but he was nowhere to be found. After searching for him everywhere Berkley at last gave it up, and was on his way back to the Stand, when just at the paddock-wicket he encountered the jockey.

"Good morning, Sam ; your mount looks terribly ripe. I can only hope he's not as good as he looks."

Burton's eye gave an almost imperceptible flicker as he replied, in a low tone, "Coriolanus don't win if I can help it," and with that he passed quickly onward to mount his horse.

One of the first people Holt met upon regaining the Ring was his rat-like confederate, Mr. Larcher.

"There's a robbery up of some sort!" ejaculated the attorney, in a harsh husky whisper. "Luxmoore's declared to win with Beggarman, and there's been a mild revulsion in the betting in consequence. They take eight to one about Beggarman now, and are laying tens against Coriolanus."

"What about ours?" inquired Berkley, sharply.

"He don't go well in the market at all," returned Mr. Larcher; "he's gone back a good point out, and I've heard even as much as four to one laid against him. Indeed, it's a moot question whether Ptolemy isn't as good a favourite as he is."

"Have you seen Joe Milton?" asked Holt.

"Yes, I have; and there is no doubt about it that Joe has been at brandy

this morning. If he's sold us," continued the attorney, vindictively, "I'll answer for his having the worst year he ever had since he left his mother's knee. I can put the screw upon Joe pretty severe, and—he, he!" concluded Mr. Larcher, with a chuckle, "I will without mercy. He's played a good many tricks in his day, but with *me*! No, I can't believe he'd be such a fool."

The numbers are up; a little while more, and the whole twenty runners for the Derby of 18—pace past the Grand Stand, narrowly scanned by their respective adherents. Coriolanus and Ptolemy the pick of the lot, say the *cognoscenti*, although both The Felon and Caraway have a large proportion of admirers. As the Honble. pushes his way through the Ring with a view to going on to the course to see the preliminary canter, he runs across Mr. Plyant.

"A regular game this, Mr. Laceby,"

observes the bookmaker, grinning. "If ever you saw the public puzzled it's now; and if ever you saw that Holt division in a hole it's now!"

"What do you mean?" replied Jim, quickly.

"Just this, that the public are tossing up half-crowns about which is the best of the Blithedown pair. I was right, sir; the only way of getting a price about Beggarman was to back them both till the day, and then lay as much as one cleverly could back about Coriolanus. I've hedged a fairish stake. Secondly, if I know anything about the betting-ring, The Felon is not intended to win."

"Pooh!" said Jim. "Good heavens, what did they buy Coriolanus for, except to clear the way for their own horse? Besides, Holt has such an interest in preventing Mr. Luxmoore winning, he will always assuredly do so if he can."

"That don't signify, sir," rejoined the

bookmaker. "I understand my brethren, and some of them have a vulture-like scent for a dead horse. The corbies, as we call 'em, Mr. Laceby, are gathered round The Felon, and missing no chance to lay against him."

"A dangerous one out of our way, if it is so," replied the Honble., as he passed through the wicket.

"You will see," rejoined the bookmaker shortly.

And now the horses come streaming past in their canter. Ptolemy, in the green and silver braid, leads the way, an omen hailed by his backers as indicative of his pride of place when he shall next pass the chair. The Felon, it is agreed, gallops somewhat dead, and shows a lack of that fire which one rather likes to see in a horse before a big race; but then, argue his adherents, he always was a sober, old-fashioned horse, and a bit of a slug till called upon in earnest. Caraway's

action is voted rather too fighting; but Coriolanus commands general admiration by his long sweeping stride and resolute style of galloping, though some of the older racing-men rather deprecate the manner in which he tears at his bridle, and shake their heads as if hard-pullers were hopeless cases, and there had never been a Touchstone or a Launcelot.

Busy talking to Mr. Larcher, or vainly endeavouring to discover the reason of The Felon's declining popularity, Berkley Holt has paid no heed to the canter past the Stand.

The horses have nearly all gone by, but just as Berkley reaches the railing of the Ring abutting on the course, the rearmost lot sweep by, led by Beggarman, whose peculiarly low, stealthy action attracts much attention. As "the black" passes, Holt gives a slight start, and mutters between his teeth, as he recognizes Sam Burton, "He's on the wrong un, by God!"

Another minute, and it flashes across him, quick as lightning, that he has been deceived, or "sold all round," as he tersely expresses it. He does not quite understand how or by whom. What makes the layers against The Felon so keen?—and Berkley had been keen as Mr. Plyant to note who those layers were, and knew that they were of the order whose fierce opposition boded little good to the animal they made a target of—men who seldom opened fire against a favourite without most excellent reason for so doing. It must be true then, also, he argues, that Beggarman really is the best of the Blithedown pair, and it is with a muttered execration that he recalls Sam Burton's confidential assurance that "Coriolanus shall not win if he can help it." Moodily does Berkley seek his box, and in glum silence level his glasses upon the horses now mustering in the hands of the starter.

They are some few minutes getting to-

gether, and then much time is cut to waste in false starts, chiefly occasioned by a sulky brute who, sticking his toes resolutely in the ground, declines all opportunity of getting off on terms with the rest, and thrice the impetuous Coriolanus is almost to the top of the hill before Justice can pull him up and bring him back. But as Sydney Smith said, there's an end to everything except Wigmore Street, and at last that fierce roar of the crowd, so well known to racing men, proclaims "They are off." For two or three seconds they are in a cluster, for, with the exception of the mulish animal left at the post, it is an excellent start; then Coriolanus forges to the front, and it is at once patent that his mission is to make running for Beggarman. Ere they even reach the top of the hill a wild cry from the ring proclaims that the favourite is beat; and Holt, through his glasses, can see that his jockey is already riding The Felon. It was not without

knowledge those fierce opponents of the colt had laid against him so freely at the last. They disappear behind the furzes, and when next there is a clear view Coriolanus holds a two lengths lead and is evidently bringing his field along a cracker. As they run down the hill Caraway runs into second place, while Ptolemy and Beggarman show well in front of the ruck; The Felon is seen toiling hopelessly in the rear. The Two Thousand winner comes round Tattenham Corner with a clear lead; a few strides further and Caraway is done with, while Ptolemy, on the rails, creeps rapidly up to the leader. As they cross the road he gets to Coriolanus's girths; a little more and it is evident that the latter is in trouble, and there comes that first cry about the result always heard at Epsom. In this case it is "Ptolemy wins!" Though in difficulties, the Two Thousand winner runs wondrous game, and had it not been for his three previous

journeys to the top of the hill, and his having been sacrificed for his stable companion, there is no saying that he might not just have won ; but at this juncture Sam Burton, who, riding strictly to orders, had gone round his horses at the Corner, comes with a wet sail on the rails next the Stand, whilst the fifty to one outsider, the nameless Daphne colt, appears full of running on the opposite side the course. It is all over with Coriolanus ; and Ptolemy, to the dismay of the backers of the green and silver braid, stops at the bell, beaten. Sam Burton and his antagonist are both hard upon their horses, and a slashing race home is decided in favour of Beggarman by a half length.

“ All right,” cried Laceby, as the numbers went up. “ By Jove, Harold, what a *coup*, old fellow ! We’ve all won mints of money, and you’ve won a home for your bride-elect to boot. Who-hoop !—hurrah for the black and crimson hoops !” and the

usually phlegmatic Honble. sent his hat into the air like a neophyte.

“Done!” muttered Berkley Holt between his teeth, as he descended from the Stand. “One might have guessed that scoundrel Joe Milton would never be able to resist such a temptation as ‘cooking the favourite for the Derby.’”

CONCLUSION.

VERY indignant indeed were the public over this Beggarman's Derby ; for, despite Mr. Plyant's prognostications, " the black " had been by no means a great favourite with them. The colt upon which the many-headed had staked their individual sovereigns was The Felon, undeniably the best two-year-old performer ; and the public, albeit they always have an itching for a mysterious outsider at a long price, are wont to be guided chiefly by public form in their betting on the Derby—good clear, demonstrable form, mind, such as they can read and digest in their newspapers ; for this vast section of backers, who gamble in small sums, seldom go near

a race-course, and benefit little when they do. One man I've known who always declared he could do very well as long as he confined himself to issuing his commissions from the club smoking-room after due perusal of the special edition of the *Evening Standard*, but that he always came to grief when he attended a race-meeting.

Very wrathful indeed are the public about the extraordinary performance of The Felon, who was virtually beaten before he had compassed three furlongs; but the great difficulty is at whom to levy the abuse that rises to their lips. The sporting papers comment pretty freely upon the subject, but know that it is useless to waste powder and shot over the impalpable Podmore, and that to scarify the incorrigible Joe Milton is to throw mud at a scavenger. Backers at times would do well to consider to whom horses belong, and by whom they are trained, as well as what their perform-

ances may be. It might be pronounced a very bad race for backers all round, except Luxmoore and his intimates—the gentlemen, as a rule, were all on Coriolanus, and many of them to the last disbelieved that Blithedown had a better, in direct defiance of both the declaration to win with Beggarman and the tone of the market. The great outside army of speculators were principally followers of the mysterious Mr. Podmore, and sent a wild wail of wrath afloat upon seeing The Felon so ignominiously succumb, perfectly ready to mob either Podmore or Joe Milton could they but come at them; but the one was a shadow, and Mr. Milton much too used to such little differences with the public not to be discreetly out of the way after the termination of the race.

When Berkley Holt encountered Mr. Larcher, their conversation was brief, if unsatisfactory.

“Done all round!” said Mr. Holt

sharply. "Sold by every one who could possibly assist at such a putting up of the shutters. Joe Milton, that thief Burton" (not Holt's fault he was not a bigger); "even my blessed cousin seems to have fresh shuffled his pack."

"He, he!" chuckled the attorney, in a harsh, low, cackling manner; "I think, I wouldn't say positively, you know, but I do think our friend Milton, at all events, will find it a very expensive race. I shouldn't be surprised if he were breaking stones on the road before the end of the year; and, by God!" said the attorney, as his voice sank to a malignant whisper, "I shall be much disappointed if he's not pursuing that occupation or its equivalent."

Great was the jubilation in Grosvenor Gardens, as may be well imagined, when the telegram bore thither the tidings of the victory; another, an hour later, from her spouse, informed Mrs. Layton that Harold, the Honble., and Herrick would dine there

that night. The message went on further to say there would be probably some further addition to the party, and vaguely wound up with "ask any one you like."

The sisters laughingly agreed that there was "a very after-luncheon air" about papa's telegram, but that it was highly expedient to prepare for some six or eight additions to the dinner-table. Mr. Layton, indeed, had been a spectator of the race, and in the exuberance of spirits produced by the result became rather promiscuous in his dinner invitations. It was banteringly hinted, later on, that a troupe of negro minstrels and an Egyptian family were amongst those whom he had bidden to the feast, and that he had jumbled up the Zingari, the children of the Nilic Delta, and the defeated Derby favourite, Ptolemy, in one prodigious *pot pourri*. People do get things a little mixed in the afternoon glow of a successful Derby, and are apt to mingle circumstances, champagne, and

salad, invitations to lunch then and there with those of a more weighty description ; to make rather, in short, a hotch-potch of the race and its surroundings. Mr. Layton had fair excuse in this respect. It was not that he had won much money, for, in good sooth, the old gentleman could not be deemed to have benefited much. He had "plunged" to the extent of a pony on Coriolanus, and only backed the winner for ten pounds at the last moment, so that his gains were by no means excessive ; but he knew that his daughter's happiness was now thoroughly assured. It was not that he would have had misgivings about entrusting her to Harold had the race resulted otherwise ; but Mr. Layton was much too shrewd a man of the world not to know that Luxmoore could never quite forget the loss of Liddington, and though he esteemed him far too loyal a gentleman ever to allude to the sacrifice, if in reality sacrifice it were, yet it was better far

that Harold should still hold the home of his ancestors. Do we not all know the bitterness engendered by the devising of some few thousands in somewhat unexpected quarters—with what rancorous and unforgiving hate those not included in the disposition of the loaves and fishes regard those that are? It is sad it should be so, but it is best humanity should be put to the test as little as may be; although it must be put on record, with due reverence, that if the catastrophe vaguely designated in these days as “awful grief” should overtake us, there is usually somehow a sprinkling of true friends to mitigate the affliction which frightens our fair-weather acquaintance from our home and haunts.

It was a big and a gay dinner that night in Grosvenor Gardens. The hilarity of the host communicated itself to the whole table, and as the Honble. drily observed to Miss Layton—

"Your father is rapidly coming to the conclusion that he has won the Derby, I think."

"I am sure he could not be more excited if he had," replied the young lady. "I know he was downright miserable after he had interfered with Gracie's engagement, and since, thanks to you, that misunderstanding was all cleared up, he has been as wild about Harold's success as any of you."

"Why do you persist in ascribing that little bit of diplomacy to me, when you know it was a plot of your own contriving?"

"Ah!" said Miss Layton, laughing; "but who was my right hand?—who played Guido Fawkes, and would have been the scapegoat had I been wrong in my conjectures?"

"Can't see I ran much risk," rejoined the Honble. "Might have had a bit of a row with Harold, but we're too good friends to quarrel in earnest, you know."

"Fill your glasses, all of you," cried Mr.

Layton from the bottom of the table. "Toast drinking's out of fashion, but we don't win the Derby except once in a way. You all know that Harold's free to do as he likes now ; he's going to marry my girl, and I once made it a *sine quâ non* that his giving up racing must preface the ceremony. I do so no longer. Why? Because, gentlemen, what you do not know is this—he was willing to give up his inheritance for her sake ; and when a man cares as honestly for a woman as that, I think he may be safely trusted never to cause her unhappiness. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, this was the last cast of the dice, and had not Beggarman won to-day, there would have been, I hope, a blithe marriage all the same, but Liddington Grange would not have been their home, as I'm sure you will all agree with me in wishing now it may long be. I call upon you all to drink the health and happiness of Harold Luxmoore."

“Harold Luxmoore and his bride-elect,” cried Herrick, “and God bless ’em!”

The toast was drunk with much enthusiasm, as may well be supposed. When you have a great success by which your friends have more or less profited, supplemented by an excellent dinner, they are wont to wax enthusiastic about you. Very patent your virtues upon that occasion, rest assured. “Success is a rare paint—hides all the ugliness;” but success combined with champagne—bah! he must be a bitter cynic who can find the cracks in your character at such times.

Harold made a quiet, unassuming reply on behalf of himself and Gracie—hoped they might jointly welcome all the present company at Liddington next autumn, and finally called upon them to pledge another bumper to the now famous descendant of Tramp, whose speed and endurance had so well served them that day.

“Beggarmen, ladies and gentlemen, with all the honours!”

"Rather a bore, having to go abroad," observed the Honble. to Luxmoore, after the ladies had retired; "after landing such a stake I feel it's sinful not to follow up one's luck at Ascot."

"Why the deuce don't you?" rejoined Harold.

"Can't, you know," replied Jim. "You recollect what I told you? I can't go on taking the girl in to dinner, as I did to-day, and all that sort of thing."

"Take her to church on the same day I do her sister. You pitched a good deal of advice into me, old man, and did me the best turn I ever had done me in my life; let me do as much for you."

"Look here, Harold," retorted the Honble., putting his glass in his eye and speaking with much solemnity; "there are foxes predestined to lose their tails, and men marked out for matrimony—you were one. I was anxious you shouldn't make a mess of it, that's all."

“Well, I haven’t, thanks in some measure to you. ‘Go thou and do likewise.’”

“Gad, you’re wandering!” retorted the Honble.

“Not at all; you’d do very well as a married man, Jim.”

“Jove, I never thought of that!”

“Well do,” rejoined Luxmoore; “it’s not near so dull as fishing in Norway by yourself.”

“Confound your cheek,” said the Honble. laughing. “Wait till you’ve tried, before you speak so authoritatively. Come upstairs; I’m sure we’ve had as much wine as is good for us.”

Mr. Layton, who was deep in narrating the story of the race for about the nineteenth time, little heeded their departure, so absorbed was he in describing Beggarman’s position at Tattenham Corner, in positive, emphatic terms, albeit he had actually confused Coriolanus and the winner so much, in consequence of the

similarity of their colours during the struggle, as to constitute himself a very unreliable *raconteur*.

Jim Laceby, when he arrived in the drawing-room, took the coffee that was handed to him mechanically, and became plunged in thought. It was new to him, this idea of becoming Harold's brother-in-law. He had so utterly set aside the possibility of his marrying, that to have it urged upon him as a fact capable of almost immediate achievement rather staggered him. It was evident that Luxmoore by no means looked upon his chance as hopeless, and he could not but admit that he looked forward to a dreary time abroad. The question was, if it were likely that Annie Layton, whom he had known from her school-girl days, could possibly regard him in any other light than that of an old friend. The Honble. Jim might be cool and master of great knowledge of life, but he was not one whit conceited. He knew

very well there was no great incompatibility of age between them, that his income and position were quite sufficient, if the girl fancied him, to justify his proposing to her; but the hitch was, the Layton girls had so long regarded him as an old friend that it might seem most incongruous to Annie to look upon him in any other light. Harold, apparently, did not see that objection. What should he do? He had never dreamt of marrying; but then, also, he had never dreamt of falling in love again. There are more foxes lose their tails than is known to society, thought the Honble., ruefully recurring to that Norway trip he contemplated.

Suddenly his reflections are broken in upon by Gracie Layton.

"Mr. Laceby," she exclaimed, laughing, "what is the meaning of this unwonted gravity, and on this night, of all others, when *we* have won the Derby?"

"Beg pardon," replied the Honble. "I

was thinking what a bore this Norway trip was."

"Then why do you go? I think it most unkind of you. How am I to get married properly without you to see to it?"

"I fancy Harold will see to it with considerable care," rejoined Laceby, laughing. "I think he will make sure of your belonging to him for good."

"But you should be best man, you know, and return 'health for the bridesmaids,' and all that. I can't understand this sudden craze for Norway—you never wanted to go there before."

"Never was in delicate health before," rejoined the Honble. coolly. "Doctors pronounce change imperative now——"

"You don't look ill, and I should be very sorry to think there was much the matter," replied the girl in a low tone. "You brought Harold and me together again, Mr. Laceby, and I can never forget

that. Ha ! here comes papa, and I'm afraid he's drunk Beggarman's health just once more than was quite discreet."

A few minutes later and Jim Laceby found himself sitting next to Annie Layton. Their conversation appeared to become interesting, though whether based upon Æsop's Fables I don't know. One fragment only has reached the ears of the chronicler.

"Of course, I shall give up hunting; we can't afford that," said the Honble.

"Of course you'll do nothing of the kind," replied Miss Layton. "One hunter must be converted into a lady's horse, so that I may come occasionally with you and see the throw off; but there shall be no other alteration in the stud. No, Jim," she continued, blushing brightly—"I feel so impudent, you know, calling you by your Christian name, as yet—I'll have none of either your old amusements or your old friends laid down on my account.

If our courtship began in the school-room, and I believe it did, remember, you are not going to marry a school-girl."

* * * *

Liddington is both pleased and surprised at the result of the Derby ; but mingled with the exhilaration produced by the intelligence that one of the Grange colts has been proclaimed winner at Epsom, comes the bitter reflection that Liddington is not one whit the better for it. Liddington, indeed, is decidedly the worse, for "the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker," and all the farmers in the vicinity, had staked their ventures on the Two Thousand winner, and instead of the handsome Coriolanus, it was the queer-shaped son of the old Tramp mare that had won. Liddington feels very proud, but slightly impecunious. The laurel-leaf, of course, is a gratifying thing to have achieved ; and has not a Liddington horse, owned by a Liddington man, won the great race of the

year?—but Liddington feels more solid recompense ought to have attended the victory. They rang the bells, of course ; there was much “hooraying,” and a great beer and supper at the Grange stud-farm ; but the grim thought would crop up ever and again, namely, that the black and crimson hoops had won, and Liddington, worse than not being on at all, had been on the wrong one.

True to the colours, though, is Nancy Hamper, and blossoms at church the next Sunday in bonnet and draperies plentifully bedecked with the above hues ; and though never a woman in Liddington is prouder of their having bred the winner of the Derby, yet Nancy even cogitates a little over the loss of those two sovereigns she had put upon Coriolanus at ten to one. It would have been so nice, she thinks, to have landed that little *coup* of twenty pounds ; and there are many speculators in the village of like opinion

who have indulged in similar hazard to Nancy Hamper.

There is a quiet air of triumph about Mr. Calvert when he returns from the fray, tempered with an evident tinge of regret. He and the doctor, as we know, had both backed Beggarman at the last, but the stud-groom was loyal to his first love.

"Yes, Nancy," he replied in response to her congratulations, "we've won the Derby, my woman, but it's been with the wrong horse. They'll never make me believe that if Coriolanus had been run on his merits he wouldn't have beaten the black—eh, doctor?"

"He beats him far enough for looks," returned Dr. Slocombe; "but I fancy, Calvert, that Darlington knows more about their actual capacity than we do, and he was very decisive about which was actually the best at Epsom."

"Well, we shall see," rejoined the stud-

groom. "Beggarman don't happen to be in the St. Leger, and you'll see what a mess Coriolanus will make of The Felon and all the lot at Doncaster."

"He'll never make such a mess of The Felon," replied the doctor, laughing, "as his own stable did this week. I'm not a scurrilous man, but if ever I did see a horse thoroughly cooked it was that."

"It might have been temper," observed Mr. Calvert, meditatively.

"It might have been that, or confluent small-pox, or anything else; but, as a medical man, mind, I should pronounce it an inopportune opiate."

"That's a biggish word, doctor," rejoined Mr. Calvert with a grin, "but if it means administered at the wrong time, well, I should think some of them held a different opinion up there on Wednesday."

Three months later and the village is decked with flags, the bells are once more ringing, and all Liddington is a-tiptoe, for

is not the young squire bringing home his bride after the honeymoon, and are not his sister-in-law and her spouse, the Honble. Jim Laceby, accompanying them? There are great rejoicings upon the occasion, and the way the Liddington ale flowed, the festivities in the park, and the general open house that Harold Luxmoore kept, especially as regarded his tenantry, and the small shop-keepers of the village, did much to console them for their Derby disappointment. There were servants' balls and tradesmen's balls and farmers' balls; the sackbut, psaltery, and tankard were ever to the fore; and the glorious month of August was all one mad revel for Liddington. Even Mr. Calvert relaxed, and bet Nancy Hamper a silk dress to a bowl of punch that Coriolanus won the fast-approaching St. Leger.

“And shall be right glad to lose it to boot, Nancy, as you well know; but if it comes off in punch—well, mind it's strong; we shall all want comforting that night.”

How Coriolanus' suspensory ligament gave way a fortnight afterwards, how The Felon had been so drugged for the Epsom Race as never to recover from its effects, and that consequently Ptolemy won the great Doncaster prize—are they not matters of turf history ?

True to his word, Harold Luxmoore at the end of the season disposed of all his racers in training; the breeding stud he still keeps up, and though no longer running horses himself, is always much gratified at the prices the Liddington yearlings command, and takes, with his wife, a keen interest in their subsequent career.

Honesty is not always rewarded in this world, and truth compels me to admit that Messrs. Holt and Larcher are at this present time to be numbered amongst the most prosperous of bookmakers. Even the "Hædylus" at last had to hint to Mr. Holt that it would be well if he resigned. He was quite equal to the occasion, and retorted

that he should have infinite pleasure in so doing as soon as several members of that institution had settled their personal accounts with him. He converted his enforced retirement into a bankruptcy, and the veriest oyster had to expand and part reluctantly with his beard or its golden equivalent. But Holt and the attorney drive a thriving trade nowadays, as Miss Hemmings' silken robes and victoria bear ample testimony.

THE END.



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